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**Patrons:**

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The Countess of Mar  
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John Rutter CBE

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

## 2023 - 2024 NHS FLU VACCINE AND ME/CFS

People with ME/CFS (myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome) have a chronic neurological disease that is likely to be exacerbated if they catch flu.

They should therefore be eligible for an NHS Flu (influenza) vaccine if they choose to have one.

**Background:**

The NHS Green Book lists clinical risk groups who should receive influenza immunisation in Chapter 19 (page 15, table 19.4). This list includes chronic neurological disease and refers to some specific examples.

The Green Book entry on flu vaccination also states (paragraph 1, page 16) that:

*The list above is not exhaustive, and the medical practitioner should apply clinical judgment to take into account the risk of influenza exacerbating any underlying disease that a patient may have, as well as the risk of serious illness from influenza itself. Influenza vaccine should be offered in such cases even if the individual is not in the clinical risk groups specified above.*

<https://tinyurl.com/429ut5ap>

**The two eligibility criteria in the Green Book that apply to ME/CFS are:**

1. Having a chronic neurological disease. Several examples are provided and it is made clear that the list is not exhaustive. Decisions should therefore be made on clinical judgement.
2. The risk of influenza exacerbating any underlying disease that a patient may have.

**In relation to ME/CFS:**

1. ME/CFS is classified as a neurological disease in SNOMED-CT and by the World Health Organisation in ICD10 (G93:3). This classification is recognised by the NHS and NICE.

SNOMED coding:

52702003 - Chronic fatigue syndrome - SNOMED CT

Information about the SNOMED CT code 52702003 representing Chronic fatigue syndrome.

<https://tinyurl.com/48f5zp5p>

2. ME/CFS can produce similar adverse effects on the quality of life to other chronic neurological conditions such as MS.
3. Patient evidence confirms that people with ME/CFS can experience a significant and sometimes persisting relapse of their ME/CFS symptoms after catching influenza.



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4. The new NICE guideline on ME/CFS (in 1.14.5) states that an acute illness is one of the main causes of relapse of ME/CFS:

<https://tinyurl.com/mwyx22j6>

5. In previous correspondence on this matter, Dame Sally Davies, a former Chief Medical Officer, stated:

*“As you know, the risk of serious illness from flu and consequent hospitalisation and death is higher among those with underlying health conditions such as M.E.”*

*“We know that people with chronic neurological conditions are approximately 40 times more likely to die if they develop flu than individuals who have no other underlying health conditions.”*

*“The best way for people at risk from flu to protect themselves and their families is to get the flu vaccine. People with clinical risk factors are eligible to receive the seasonal flu vaccine free each winter.”*

#### **Conclusion:**

Doctors are able to use their clinical judgement to prescribe a Flu vaccine to their patients who have ME/CFS and would like to have this protection. We would be grateful if particular consideration can be given to those with ME/CFS who are severely and very severely affected, are house-bound or bed-bound, and deemed to be at most risk.

**Yours sincerely**

**Dr Charles Shepherd**

Hon Medical Adviser, The ME Association  
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