

Flu vaccinations for people with learning disabilities – reasonable adjustments and use of nasal spray

Health services have a legal obligation to put reasonable adjustments in place to ensure equal access to healthcare services for people with disabilities. This means GP surgeries are required to put in place reasonable adjustments to help people with learning disabilities have their flu injections where this is possible.

Many people with learning disabilities are anxious about needles but there are a lot of resources and approaches that can help them to tolerate injections or blood tests. There is more detailed advice, as well as good practice case studies, in the following report Blood tests for people with learning disabilities: making reasonable adjustments.

This includes guidance on:

- how to help someone to be prepared, for example desensitisation work
- how to support the person to make an informed decision if they have capacity to do so, for example using accessible leaflets and videos
- how to improve their experience, for example the use of topical applications to numb the skin prior to needle insertion
- how safe-holding and sedation can be used if other approaches such as desensitisation have failed and a best interests decision has been taken that this is warranted

When someone with learning disabilities who is anxious about needles requires an injection there should always be consideration of less invasive alternatives if they are available. In this case this would include the use of the nasal spray flu vaccine.

The nasal flu spray (Fluenz Tetra nasal spray suspension Influenza vaccine (live attenuated, nasal) - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (emc) (medicines.org.uk)) is not licensed for adults, as there is evidence it may be less effective than the injected inactivated influenza vaccine. However PHE guidance for healthcare workers (Page 23) says that medical practitioners can choose to use the nasal spray “off-label” and that this can be for “patients with learning difficulties who become seriously distressed with needles”. UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has agreed that the national stock of the nasal spray flu can be used for this purpose but it needs to be agreed with the patients GP and individually prescribed using a Patient Specific Direction (PSD).