

Maria Caulfield MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

10 August 2023

Dear Minister,

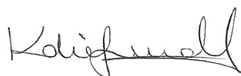
I am writing as the newly elected chair of the British Medical Association's General Practitioners Committee, England, to raise two critical issues with you of patient safety, regarding flu and COVID-19 immunisations.

It has come to our attention that NHS England (NHSEI) may be considering delaying the start of the flu vaccination programme from the 1st September 2023 to early October 2023. We believe that making such a change will significantly impact patient uptake but will also impact GPs' ability to deliver this vital public health programme. We are asking that you raise this with NHSEI, as a matter of urgency, so that the adult flu vaccination programme can proceed as planned from 1st September, allowing vulnerable patients the best opportunity to be protected ahead of the coming months, in support of winter planning.

In addition, NHSEI's recent decision to significantly reduce the fee that GPs are paid to deliver COVID-19 immunisations, by over 25%, both threatens the safety of vulnerable patients and undervalues general practice. At a time when new COVID variants are emerging it is more crucial than ever that adequate resource is made available to GPs to support the delivery of an effective immunisation programme for those patients most at risk. COVID-19 vaccinations take more than double the time to administer compared with a flu jab, and these cuts put GPs in an untenable position where some will simply no longer be able to provide this crucial service. It is also important to note that the risk of a COVID and flu spike could overwhelm hospitals with admissions in the months ahead. The emergence of the Eris BA.2.75 COVID variant only serves to emphasise this concern.

As we head into what is likely to be another difficult winter with the NHS under continued significant pressure, patients need to be protected, and our practices resourced and supported to undertake this important work. I would be happy to urgently meet with you to discuss our concerns in more detail, and to help develop an effective winter immunisation plan to protect our patients and our communities.

Your sincerely,



Dr Katie Bramall-Stainer
Chair, BMA England General Practitioners Committee

Cc: Neil O'Brien MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Primary Care and Public Health

Co-chief executive officers: Neeta Major & Rachel Podolak

