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## Flu - who is vulnerable

04 December 2015

“People with chronic diseases like long-term heart or respiratory diseases are at an increased risk of infection. When you have a chronic disease, you tend to have a more severe dose of anything you get because the body is not working as well. It’s not just flu. It will apply to everything.

“But because flu is such a common thing, we can do something about it. It’s cheap to protect someone with a vaccine. It’s a really cost effective way to reduce the risk.

“However while the vaccine would go so far to protect people with a chronic illness, it cannot be relied on to protect others who care for them. That’s why it’s also important that other people looking after these people – carers and health care workers – also get the vaccine.

“Although somebody who is affected by a chronic ailment will have the vaccine, it might not work as effectively – that’s why we go to the trouble to get as many people as possible because it will give secondary protection to those groups.

“On a good year, when a vaccine works, we think it prevents flu 70 per cent of the time. It’s effectively very good but it doesn’t work every year. This year we think it’s going to work.

Chris is also one of University’s Naked Scientists. Based at Cambridge University’s Institute of Continuing Education (ICE), the Naked Scientists are a team of scientists, doctors and communicators whose passion is to help the general public to understand and engage with the worlds of science, technology and medicine.

Chris continued: “Pregnant women are also advised to get the flu jab as changes in the immune system make them more prone to severe illness from flu. The reason for this is probably because there is an element of reprogramming of a woman’s immune system. People in this situation are at great risk of other infections. Transplant patients too are also on immunosuppressant drugs and at high risk of infection.”

“Older people aged 65 and over are also advised to have the jab because they are more susceptible to infection and are at increased risk of severe infection. They are more vulnerable and more likely to have more than one thing wrong with them.

“There is a vaccine that’s available to you, it’s free and the majority of the time it works exceptionally well. It would be a good idea to have it.”