

JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2024/25

Seasonal Influenza Immunisations

Summary points

- Bristol’s seasonal flu immunisation coverage rates are broadly in line with the national averages for over 65s and those younger in a clinical risk group.
- Seasonal flu immunisation uptake decreased across all GP-administered populations in Bristol in 2023/24, similar to the national profile and following significant increases experienced in 2020/21 in Bristol and nationally.
- Bristol coverage rates for 4 to 5 year olds increased significantly in 2023/24 but uptake for all other primary school aged children remains lower than the England average.

Seasonal influenza (flu) is an acute viral infection that is easily transmitted. For otherwise healthy individuals, seasonal flu is an unpleasant but usually self-limiting disease. However, the risk of serious illness from seasonal flu is greater in babies under six months, older people, pregnant women and those with underlying health conditions and can therefore have a significant impact at population level. Annual flu vaccination programmes are the main protective action against severe influenza illness.

Seasonal flu immunisation uptake in GP-administered populations

The vaccine programme has been offered to those age 65 and over for many years in addition to pregnant women, those who have immune-suppressing or long-term conditions, and 2-3 year old children. In 2020/21 those age 50 years and over were added to the eligible population for flu vaccination, this offer continued for 2021/22 and 2022/23 season but was withdrawn for the 2023/24 season. Within the population groups for whom the seasonal flu immunisation is administered by their GP, Bristol’s uptake rates for 2023/24 are broadly in line with national averages (Figure 1).

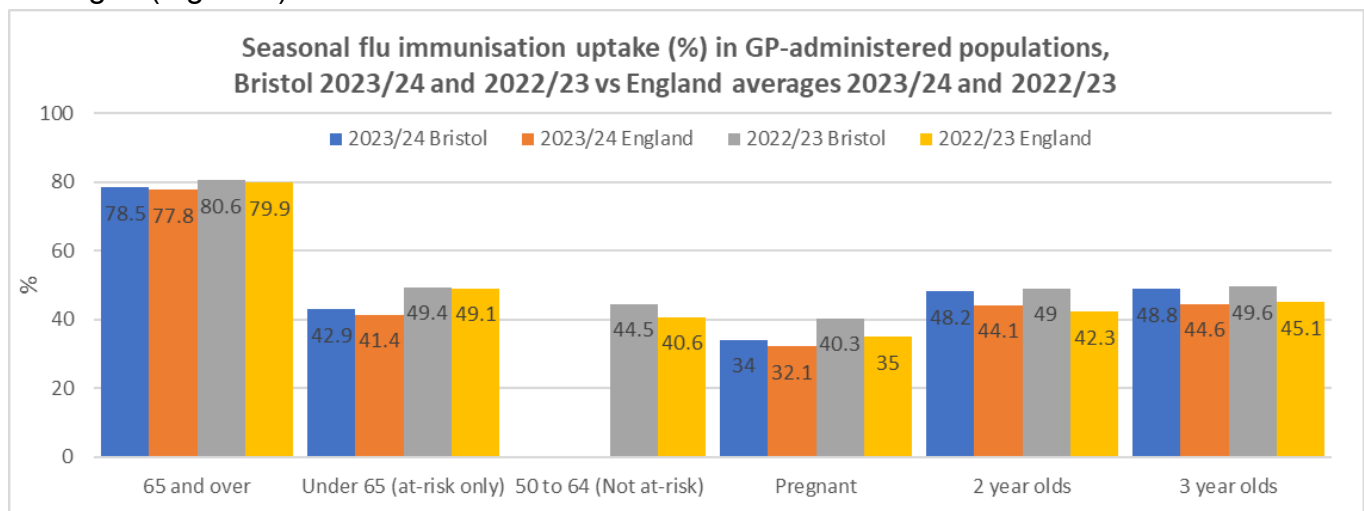


Figure 1: Seasonal flu vaccine uptake figures for GP administered populations, 2022/23-2023/24

In 2022/23 there was a significant decrease nationally in terms of uptake for 2 and 3 year old children compared with the previous year. This was not experienced in Bristol where rates have been fairly consistent over the last three years although significantly lower than 2020/21 when uptake reached 57.7% for 2 year olds and 59.5% for 3 year olds. Rates for pregnant women are higher than nationally but significantly lower than the previous year.

Coverage rates for people in Bristol aged 65 and over decreased further in 2023/24 following the 2021/22 peak (which was thought to be due to increased awareness of the vaccine as part of the communications around the COVID-19 pandemic) but are still higher than pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2). Data at GP practice level aggregated to locality level shows the variation in uptake across the city, from 73.1% in Inner City and East Bristol to 79.5% in South Bristol to 80.9% in North and West Bristol.

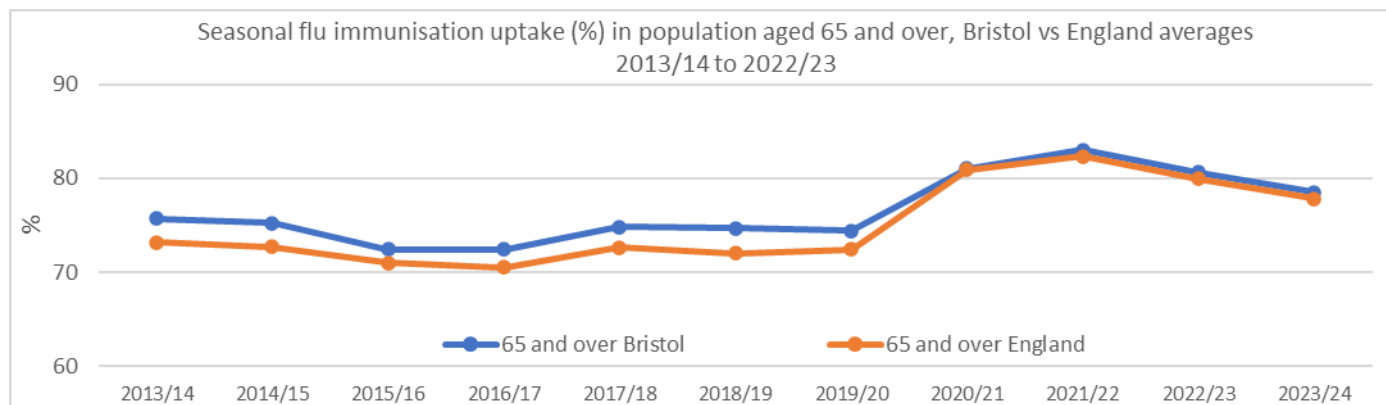


Figure 2: Seasonal flu vaccine uptake figures for GP administered population aged 65 and over, 2013/14 to 2023/24

In the under 65 at risk group Bristol’s uptake was similar to the England average. Coverage rates in Bristol decreased for the third year running (Figure 3) and are the lowest experienced in the last 11 years.

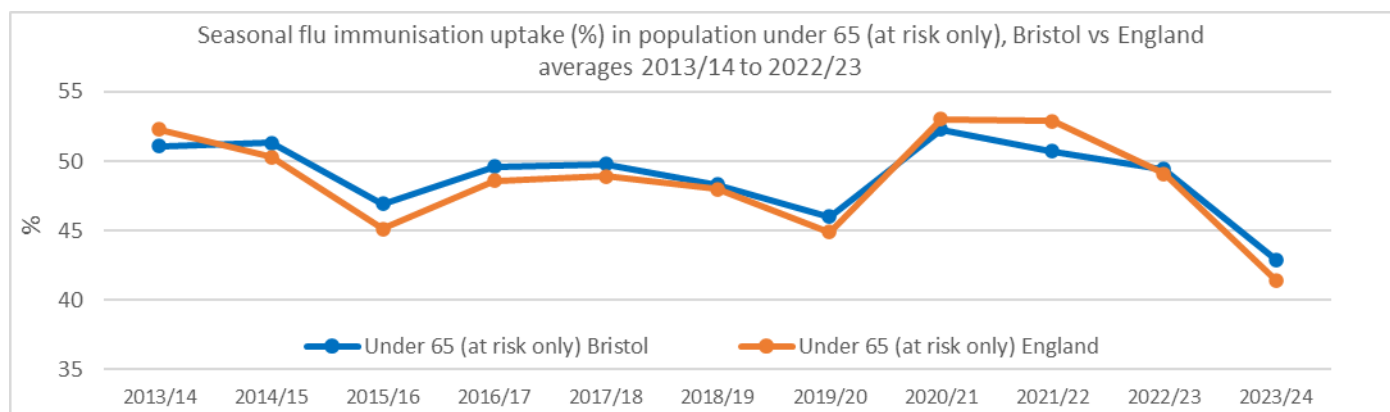


Figure 3: Seasonal flu vaccine uptake figures for GP administered population under 65 (at risk only), 2013/14 to 2023/24

Seasonal flu immunisation uptake in school-age children

Childhood seasonal flu vaccination for young school-age children (reception and years 1 & 2) was implemented in Bristol in 2015/16, using a pharmacy-based model. Since 2016/17, a school-based model has been used, delivered by a school aged immunisation service, resulting in significantly higher levels of uptake. For the winter season of 2023/24 vaccination of school age children, was offered from age 4 to 16 years (reception to year 11). This was through school based clinics plus several community clinics for those who were out of school, absent on the day of the school clinic. Figure 4 below shows that with the exception of 4 to 5 year olds,

uptake in primary school age children is lower than the England average and as the child gets older the uptake decreases.

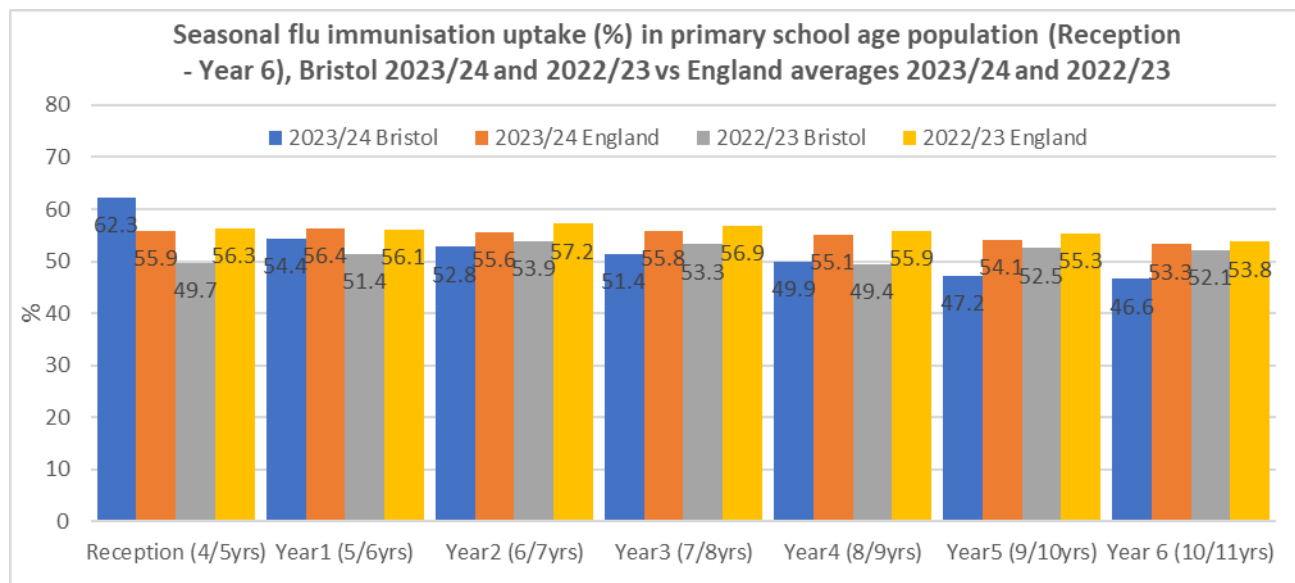


Figure 4: Seasonal flu vaccine uptake figures for GP administered populations, 2022/23-2023/24

Coverage in all academic years in Bristol schools decreased in 2021/22. Delivery of Covid-19 vaccinations to 12 to 15 year olds was prioritised during the Autumn and Winter of 2021/22 and was the likely reason for the reduced capacity to deliver flu immunisations in schools and uptake over the same period (Figures 5,6 and 7). However uptake increased significantly in 2022/23 and increased further in 2023/24 for Reception, Year 1 and Year 4 children but decreased across the other age groups. With the exception of Reception children uptake remains lower than the England average.

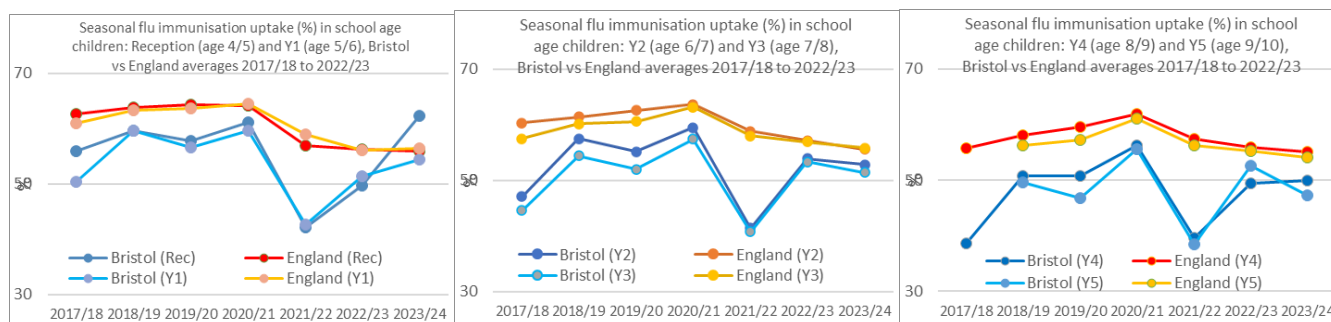


Figure 5,6,7: Seasonal flu vaccine uptake figures for primary school aged children, 2017/18 to 2023/24

The improvement in uptake in 2022/23 increased Bristol’s overall standing when compared with other local authorities, a ranking which they have maintained in 2023/24, but uptake is still in the lower half of the table. A contributory factor to this low uptake may be that the trans nasal version contains porcine gelatine. Bristol’s school-age population is much more ethnically and culturally diverse than much of the country, and there are large numbers of children in the city for whom porcine products may raise objections due to their faith or other beliefs. The injectable flu vaccine is now being offered and promoted as an alternative to this group to improve uptake.

It should be noted that other childhood immunisations are also below the level needed to protect at a population level and targeted work is ongoing to improve these also.

At present there is no routinely available data on the variation in vaccination rates between schools in the city, which previous analyses have shown to be considerable. Work is underway to receive this data annually to allow for a more detailed understanding of this variation in future.

Equalities data:

At present, Bristol City Council does not have access to detailed seasonal flu vaccination coverage data that would permit an analysis of coverage variation between population groups in the city.

National data (available via the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) fingertips tool: <https://fingertips.fingertips.phe.org.uk/>) indicates that there is relatively little variation in the coverage for the population aged 65 years and over, and those aged under 65 years at clinical risk, when analysed in reference to the relative deprivation of the area in which they live.

Covid-19 impact:

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the associated campaigns educating the public around viruses and vaccine development may have had an impact on attitudes on acceptance and uptake of Flu vaccine over the last four years. Significant increases in uptake were experienced in most age groups in 2020/21 but particularly in the 65's and over which increased further in 2021/22. Data for 2022/23 and 2023/24 shows small decreases in most of the GP-administered populations indicating that the COVID-19 influence may be waning.

Further data / links / consultations:

- Seasonal flu vaccine uptake: figures <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-uptake#seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake:-figures>

Date updated: June 2024

Date of next update: June 2025