EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom Hospital braces for flu spike

7 November 2025



Hospitals serving Epsom, St Helier and St George's are warning of a potentially severe flu season as national data reveals the number of deaths linked to the virus in England more than doubled last winter.

Figures from the UK Health Security Agency show 7,757 flu-related deaths were recorded in 2024–25, compared with 3,555 the previous year. Child deaths rose from 34 to 53 — a 56 per cent increase — while fewer people took up the offer of a flu vaccination.

Last winter, local hospitals faced intense pressure from flu alongside RSV, Covid and norovirus outbreaks, which closed wards and stretched Emergency Departments to capacity. With flu cases now rising again after the school half-term, health leaders fear a repeat.

Chief Nursing Officer for St George's, Epsom and St Helier hospitals, Elaine Clancy, urged residents to act now. "Last flu season was particularly nasty and we're very concerned that this year could be even worse – we're preparing for a spike of flu onto our wards," she said. "We see people dying every year from flu and sadly thousands more will likely this year. I strongly recommend booking your jab now, as it takes up to 14 days to fully kick in."

Local mother Amy Clare, from Sutton, knows how dangerous flu can be. Her five-week-old son Jonah was rushed to Epsom Hospital's Emergency Department with the virus in December 2022.

"What started as a fever quickly escalated," said Amy. "When the doctor told us we'd be spending Christmas in hospital, I was devastated. But he was in the best place to get better. The care we received from the moment we walked into A&E was fantastic – the staff immediately knew something wasn't right and were with us every step of the way."

Jonah was discharged the day after Christmas but continued to receive daily treatment until the New Year. "The care Jonah received saved his life," said Amy.

Pregnant women are strongly advised to have the flu jab at any stage of pregnancy. It protects both mother and baby, but uptake remains low — only around one in three expectant mothers in England were

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vaccinated last year.

Those eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination include:
– everyone aged 65 and over
– people under 65 with long-term health conditions such as diabetes or heart problems
– children aged two and three, and all primary school children
– some secondary school pupils (Years 7 to 11)
– residents in care homes
– carers and those receiving carer's allowance
– people living with someone who has a weakened immune system
– frontline health and social care workers

People can book or amend their flu vaccination appointment online: Book, change or cancel a free NHS flu vaccination at a pharmacy – NHS.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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