

Flu clinics: 5 quick wins for a smoother patient journey

A practical guide to flu clinic preparation in general practice

Flu clinics place pressure on practice teams before the first patient arrives. This guide provides five practical changes that can make the journey easier for patients and more manageable for staff.

Use this guide before invitations go out

Work through the checklists with the people who manage patient communications, appointments, reception and reporting. Keep current national and local programme guidance alongside this guide; eligibility and delivery arrangements can change each season and across UK nations.

What you will find inside

- ✓ A 30-minute planning huddle and readiness checklist
- ✓ Prompts for clearer invitations and patient information
- ✓ A decision guide for booking and support routes
- ✓ A practical process for reminders, cancellations and released capacity
- ✓ A short review framework for improving clinics while they are running



Prepare the full journey in 30 minutes

A flu clinic may be full on paper yet still create unnecessary work. The most useful starting point is to map each stage as one journey.

Information → Invitation → Booking → Reminder → Attendance → Cancellation → Review

A gap at one stage tends to appear as pressure at the next. For example, unclear eligibility information creates questions; unclear booking instructions create calls; and a cancellation process without an owner leaves unused capacity.

The 30-minute flu clinic huddle

Time	What to agree
5 minutes	What patients need to know before booking: eligibility information, clinic dates, location and next step.
10 minutes	Test every booking route as if you were a patient. Check the link, instructions and fallback for people who need support.
10 minutes	Agree what happens after a reminder or cancellation: who sees it, who acts and how available capacity is reused.
5 minutes	Choose the measures you will review each week, including DNAs and recurring patient questions.

Readiness checklist

✓	Action	Owner	By when
☐	Confirm clinic dates, locations, appointment types and booking windows.		
☐	Agree which patients will receive which invitation, and who owns the list and send process.		
☐	Set out the available routes: direct booking, NHS App or another approved service, phone and in-person support.		
☐	Check that patient-facing information is current, plain-English and consistent across SMS, website and reception scripts.		
☐	Agree who monitors cancellations, how often, and how released appointments can be reused.		
☐	Decide what you will review during the programme, not just afterwards.		

Fix patient information before it reaches reception

A good invitation answers the practical questions before a patient needs to ask them. It should point to the relevant next step, not send people on a search across several channels.

Before you send

Check that the message explains why the patient has been contacted, what action is needed, how to book, where to find more information and what to do if the route is not suitable for them.

Avoid including fixed eligibility details that may date quickly. Instead, link to the current national or local guidance your practice has approved, and make clear where patients can find help if they remain unsure.

*Online resources: National flu guidance for **England**, **Scotland**, **Wales** and **Northern Ireland**.*

When routine questions keep appearing

Repeated questions are useful feedback. If patients repeatedly ask about dates, location or booking, the answer may need to be clearer earlier in the journey. Do not treat every question as an isolated contact.

Where we can support

Surgery Assist Lite is a patient-facing digital assistant on your website that gives patients another way to find answers before they call the practice. In this scenario, it can surface general flu information from trusted national resources like nhs.uk alongside practice-provided details.

The practice should still review local information, particularly clinic arrangements and booking instructions.



Make booking straightforward, not a search

Direct booking can save time for both patients and staff, but it is only effective when people understand which route applies to them. A suitable route for one appointment may not be right for another patient or service.

Booking-route decision guide

Ask	Plan for
Can the patient book directly?	Provide a clear link to the appointments you have made available, with straightforward instructions.
Does the patient need a different route?	Provide a clear link to the appointments you have made available, with straightforward instructions.
What if digital does not work?	Offer a clear alternative, such as telephone or reception support, without asking the patient to start again.
Who can explain the route?	Give reception teams a short, agreed script so patients receive a consistent answer.

Where we can support

Surgery-Led Appointment Booking is a Surgery Connect feature that lets practices send selected patients an SMS link to book, cancel or reschedule appointments in seconds, reducing DNAs and freeing staff from routine calls.

Surgery Assist Pro is a tailored care navigation assistant that can guide patients towards the relevant practice-approved booking channel, such as the NHS App.





Agree what happens after a reminder or cancellation

An appointment reminder should make the next action easy. Patients need to know what the appointment is for, when it is happening and how to confirm or cancel. The practice needs to know what happens when a response comes back.

Set the process before clinic pressure builds

1. Decide when reminders are sent and which patient groups need an additional prompt
2. Confirm what patients can do: attend, contact the practice, confirm or cancel
3. Set an owner and a review frequency for cancellations
4. Agree the cut-off point after which a released slot is unlikely to be reused
5. Define how staff will offer or reopen available capacity

Where we can support

An outbound Voice Agent is an automated calling capability designed to provide a voice reminder route. Following identity verification, patients can hear upcoming appointment details and confirm or cancel. This can be useful alongside SMS and online options, particularly for patients less likely to use a digital route.

Do not overlook the fallback

Any automated route should include a clear way for a patient to continue if they cannot complete it. A fallback is part of a safe patient journey, not a failure of the original route.

Turn patient contact into practical changes

The best time to notice friction is while there is still time to act. Looking only at end-of-programme totals can hide problems that could have been fixed during the first clinics.

What to review	What it may tell you
Appointment type and uptake	Whether the appointments and clinic times available match demand.
DNAs	Whether timing, reminder wording or a booking route needs attention.
Flu-related questions	Where patient information or signposting may be unclear.
Cancellations	Whether capacity is being identified and reused quickly enough.
Booking-route activity	Which routes patients are finding straightforward, and where support may be needed.

Where we can support

Surgery Insights is a central dashboard for reviewing practice and patient activity. It can bring together appointment type and DNA data alongside Surgery Assist query data, showing how many patients have asked about flu appointments. This can help teams spot where information or signposting may need to improve.

Run a 10-minute review after every clinic

A ten-minute review can prevent the same issue from repeating across the programme. Keep it focused on what changed for patients and staff, and what needs to happen next.

Five questions for the team

1. What generated the most avoidable contact?
2. Where did patients get stuck or need to change route?
3. Which booking route worked best for this clinic?
4. Could released capacity be reused quickly enough?
5. What one change should we make before the next invitation or clinic?

Final thought

Good flu clinic preparation is not about digitising every step. It is about making each step clear, connected and easy to act on, while keeping suitable support available when patients need it.

Make flu clinics easier to manage

From clearer patient information to booking, reminders and review, connected access tools can help practices reduce avoidable contact and keep clinics moving.

Connect and simplify every stage of the patient journey.

Talk to our team today →

Flu
vaccinations
help keep our
community
healthy

