Protecting your child against flu

Flu immunisation in England

Information for parents and carers

Flu immunisation

Helping to protect children, every winter

5 reasons

to get your child vaccinated

1. Protect your child

The vaccine will help protect your child against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia

2. Protect you, your family and friends

Vaccinating your child will help protect more vulnerable friends and family

3. No injection needed

The nasal spray is painless and easy to have

4. It's better than having flu

The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record

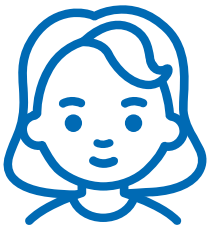
5. Avoid costs

If your child gets flu, you may have to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare

Flu vaccine is offered free to:

Children aged 2 or 3 years old

(on 31 August before flu vaccinations start in the autumn)



Some school-aged children

Children with a health condition that puts them at greater risk from flu

Further information on which children are eligible each year can be found at: **www.nhs.uk/child-flu**

Why should my child have the flu vaccine?

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can last several days or more.

Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment.

Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, acute bronchitis, and pneumonia.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness in children. Children under the age of 5 years have the highest rate of hospital admissions due to flu.

It will reduce the chance of others in your family, who could be at greater risk from flu, such as grandparents or those with long term health conditions, getting flu from your child.

It is also important because many people at risk from flu are also vulnerable to the complications of COVID-19 and research shows that if you get both flu and COVID-19 at the same time you may be more seriously ill.

It can help you avoid having to take time off work or other activities because you are ill, or need to look after your sick child.

How effective is the vaccine?

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against this unpredictable virus.

There are different strains of flu virus and the most likely strains that will cause flu are identified in advance of the flu season.

Vaccines are then made to match them as closely as possible – they will usually give some protection even if the match isn't perfect. Flu viruses can change every year so the vaccine is usually updated each year.

And protection from the vaccine may fade with time. For this reason, we recommend that your child is vaccinated against flu again this year, even if vaccinated last year.

Why are children being offered the vaccine?

As well as helping to protect children who are vaccinated, the infection is then less able to spread, and so it helps to protect other family members and friends.

Who will give my child their vaccination?

Children aged 2 and 3 years old (age on 31 August before flu vaccinations start in the autumn) will be given the vaccination at their general practice usually by the practice nurse.

School-aged children will be offered the vaccination in school, with further opportunities to get the vaccine at alternative venues for anyone who misses the session at school.

Children who are home educated will be offered the vaccine, provided they are in an eligible age group. Parents can obtain information about arrangements from their Local Authority Education Department.

How will the vaccine be given?

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray. If the nasal spray is not suitable for a child, an injection can be given instead, usually into the muscle in the upper arm.

Can the vaccine cause flu?

No, the vaccine cannot cause flu because the viruses in it have been weakened to prevent this from happening.

How does the nasal spray work?

The nasal spray contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity. This means your child will be better able to fight off flu. The vaccine is absorbed really quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

Are there any side-effects of the vaccine?

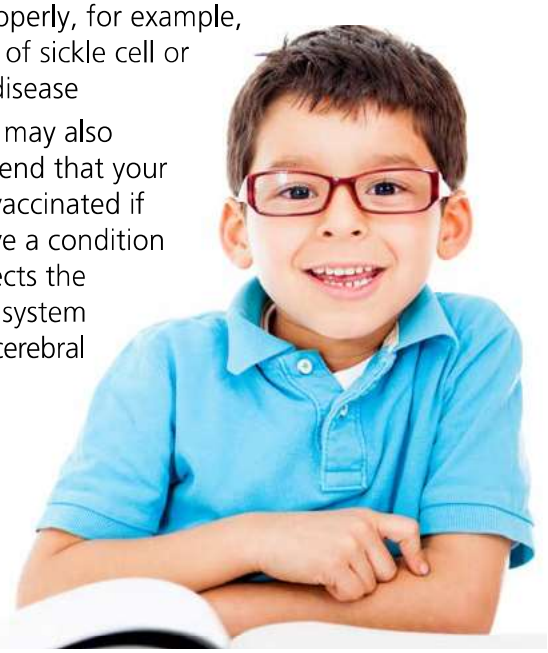
Children may develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. However, these are much less serious than developing flu or complications associated with flu. Serious side-effects are uncommon.

What about my child who has a health condition?

Children with certain health conditions, even if well managed, are at higher risk of severe complications if they get flu. It is especially important that these children are vaccinated.

These conditions include:

- serious breathing problems, for example, severe asthma needing regular inhaled or oral steroids
- serious heart conditions
- severe kidney or liver disease
- diabetes
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, for example, chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer or long-term steroid use
- problems with the spleen, either because the spleen has been removed (asplenia) or doesn't work properly, for example, because of sickle cell or coeliac disease
- your GP may also recommend that your child is vaccinated if they have a condition that affects the nervous system such as cerebral palsy



These children should have a flu vaccination every year from the age of 6 months onwards. Most will have the nasal spray vaccine but it should not be given to children under the age of 2 years.

Children under 2, and those for whom the nasal spray is not suitable for medical reasons, will be offered an injectable flu vaccine.

If your child has any health condition listed on page 8 but is not in one of the age groups being offered the vaccine in school, it is important that you contact your GP to arrange an appointment.

If you are not sure whether your child needs a flu vaccination or you need more advice, speak to your practice nurse, GP or health visitor.

When will the vaccine be given?

For 2 and 3 year olds, you should receive an invitation for your child to have it at their GP surgery in the autumn or early winter. Alternatively, you can contact them directly to make an appointment.

For primary school-aged children a vaccination session will be held at school generally during the autumn term. The school aged immunisation team will contact you via the school.

If your child is in an eligible group offered vaccine at school and has a health condition that puts them at increased risk from flu (see page 8), you can ask your child's GP surgery to provide the vaccine if you don't want to wait until the school vaccination session or if this is what you prefer.

Are there any children who shouldn't have the nasal vaccine?

As children with pre-existing medical conditions may be more vulnerable to complications of flu it is especially important that they are vaccinated. Children may not be able to have the nasal vaccine if they:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past 72 hours, they should be offered an injected flu vaccine to avoid a delay in protection
- have needed intensive care due to
  – asthma or
  – egg allergic anaphylaxis

(Children in these 2 groups are recommended to seek the advice of their specialist and may need to have the nasal vaccine in hospital)

- have a condition, or are on treatment, that severely weakens their immune system or have someone in their household who needs isolation because they are severely immunosuppressed
- are allergic to any other components of the vaccine*

If your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the injected flu vaccine.

*See the website at **www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/3296/pil** for a list of the ingredients of the vaccine

If you are unsure whether your child should get the injected vaccine or the nasal vaccine please check with the school aged immunisation team or the nurse or GP at your surgery.

Children who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid household contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems (for example those who have just had a bone marrow transplant) for around 2 weeks following vaccination.

Can the flu vaccine be given to my child at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes. The flu vaccine can be given at the same time as all the other routine childhood vaccines. The vaccination may be delayed if your child has a fever.

Also, if a child has a heavily blocked or runny nose, it might stop the vaccine getting into their system. In this case, their flu vaccination can be postponed until their nasal symptoms have cleared up.

Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatine derived from pigs (porcine gelatine)?

Yes. The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the vaccine viruses stable so that the vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

The nasal vaccine is offered to children as it is more effective in the programme than the injected vaccine. This is because it is easier to administer and considered better at reducing the spread of flu to others, who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu.

However, if your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the flu vaccine by injection. For those who may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products, an alternative injectable vaccine is available. You should discuss your options with your nurse, doctor, or school aged immunisation team.

Where can I get more information?

Visit **www.nhs.uk/child-flu** for more information. Talk to your GP, practice nurse, your child's school nurse or your health visitor if you have any further questions.

Product code 2022FCEN. 1p 3.5M May 2022 (APS). UK Health Security Agency gateway number: 2022012. This leaflet is available as a braille, Easy Read, simple text, audio, BSL video and translated into 28 languages. Please visit www.healthpublications.gov.uk to order your copies today or call 0300 123 1002