



Seasonal Flu Vaccination

Influenza (flu) is a highly infectious illness caused by the flu virus. It spreads rapidly through small droplets coughed or sneezed into the air by an infected person. For most people, flu is unpleasant but not serious. You will usually recover within a week.

Studies have shown that flu vaccines provide effective protection against the flu, although protection may not be complete and may vary between people. Protection from the vaccine gradually decreases and flu strains change over time. Therefore, new vaccines are made each year and people at risk of flu are encouraged to be vaccinated every year.

The flu vaccination is offered to people in at-risk groups. These people are at greater risk of developing serious complications if they catch flu, such as pregnant women and elderly people.

Should I get the Flu Vaccination?

For most people, flu is unpleasant but not serious. You will usually recover within a week.

However, certain people are at greater risk of developing serious complications of flu, such as bronchitis and pneumonia. These conditions may require hospital treatment.

The flu vaccine is offered free to people who are at risk, to protect them from catching flu and developing serious complications.

At-risk groups

It is recommended that you have a flu jab if you:

- are 65 years old or over
- are pregnant (see below)
- have a serious medical condition (see below)
- are living in a long-stay residential care home or other long-stay care facility (not including prisons, young offender institutions or university halls of residence)
- are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if you fall ill
- are a frontline health or social care worker (see below)

If you are the parent of a child who is over six months old and has a long-term condition on the list below, speak to your GP about the flu vaccine. Your child's condition may get worse if they catch flu.

For more information, please read: The

Pregnant women

It is recommended that all pregnant women should have the flu vaccine, whatever stage of pregnancy they're in.

This is because there is good evidence that pregnant women have an increased risk of developing complications if they get flu, particularly from the H1N1 strain.

Studies have shown that the flu vaccine can be safely and effectively given during any trimester of pregnancy. The vaccine does not carry risks for either the mother or baby. In fact, studies have shown that mothers who have had the vaccine while pregnant pass some protection to their babies, which lasts for the first few months of their lives.

People with medical conditions

The flu vaccine is offered free to anyone who is over six months of age and has one of the following medical conditions:

- chronic (long-term) respiratory disease, such as severe asthma, COPD or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological disease, such as a stroke, TIA or post-polio syndrome
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system due to conditions such as HIV, or treatments that suppress the immune system such as chemotherapy

If you live with someone who has a weakened immune system, you may also be able to have a flu vaccine. Speak to your GP about this.

Frontline health or social care workers

Employers are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place for frontline healthcare staff to have the flu vaccine.

Outbreaks of flu can occur in health and social care settings, and staff, patients and residents are at risk of infection.

Frontline health and social care staff should protect themselves by having the flu vaccine to prevent the spread of flu to colleagues and other members of the community.

If you care for someone who is elderly or disabled, speak to your GP about getting vaccinated against seasonal flu. You should also ensure that the person you care for has the flu jab.

Children

From September 1 2015, a nasal spray flu vaccine will be offered to all children aged two, three and four years (but not aged less than two or aged five or over) on the 31 August 2015 as part of the NHS childhood vaccination programme.

It will also be offered to children aged 2-18 with long-term health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and lung disease.

Children aged six months to 2 years with long-term health conditions aren't able to have the nasal spray and will get the injected flu vaccine instead.

Who should not have the flu vaccination?

You should not have the flu vaccine if you have ever had an allergic reaction to a flu vaccine or one of its ingredients. This happens very rarely.

If you have had a confirmed very serious (anaphylactic) reaction to egg, have an egg allergy with uncontrolled asthma or another type of allergy to egg, your GP may decide that you should be vaccinated with an egg-free vaccine. One such vaccine is available for this flu season (called Preflucel, manufactured by Baxter Healthcare).

If no egg-free vaccine is available, your GP will identify a suitable vaccine with a low egg (ovalbumin) content.

Depending on the severity of your egg allergy, your GP may decide to refer you to a specialist for vaccination in hospital.

If you are ill with a fever, do not have your flu jab until you have recovered.

Is this year's vaccine safe?

Although no medical procedure is totally free of risk, flu vaccines are generally very safe. The most common reaction to the jab is a sore arm, or you may feel hot for a day or two after the vaccination.

This year's flu jabs have been tested and approved for use across the UK and in Europe. The jab cannot give you flu because it doesn't contain any active viruses.

The Department of Health recommends that everyone who is eligible for a flu jab should have it as soon as the vaccine is available.

If you are in an at-risk group and do not have the jab, you will have a greater risk of developing serious complications or even dying if you get flu this winter.

If you haven't had the flu vaccine and you are in a risk group, make an appointment to get vaccinated.

Find out more about the flu vaccine, including how the vaccine is made and how it protects you.