

### Is there anybody who should not get vaccinated?

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but you should not be vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to hens' eggs or have a condition that weakens your immune system, you may not be able to have certain types of flu vaccine – check with your GP.

### Can the flu vaccine give you flu?

No. The vaccine cannot cause flu. Although a few people may feel slightly unwell after getting the flu vaccine this does not mean that they have got the flu.

### Does the vaccine have side effects?

Flu vaccinations are very safe. You may get some soreness where the vaccine was injected. Less often, people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days after being vaccinated. Other reactions are very rare.

### How does the vaccine work?

About a week to 10 days after you get the flu vaccine, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with.

### How effective is it?

Flu vaccinations only protect against flu. There are many other viruses around every winter including COVID-19 which cause flu-like symptoms. A small number of people may get flu even if they have been vaccinated, but it is likely to be a milder dose than if they had not been vaccinated.

### When is the best time to be vaccinated for flu?

It is important that you get your flu vaccination in early autumn to be ready to fight off infection. You need to get a new dose of the vaccine each year, as protection doesn't last from one year to the next. The new vaccine, available in the autumn, protects against different strains of flu, so even if you were vaccinated as late as March 2023 you still need the new vaccine.

### How do I get the vaccine?

Your GP practice's website may have information, or phone your practice to hear their arrangements for flu vaccination. Your local participating community pharmacy may also offer the vaccine to certain eligible groups.

For more information about the flu vaccine talk to your GP, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist, or visit:

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)  
[www.pha.site/flu](http://www.pha.site/flu)

This leaflet is available in other formats and languages. For further details visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)



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# Flu is more serious than you think

## Get the vaccine now



Each year the flu vaccine helps protect against the most common strains of flu likely to be circulating. This leaflet highlights why it is important to get the flu vaccine. Studies show that for some people with both COVID-19 and flu virus infections there is an increased risk of complications and even death, although this is rare. It is more important than ever to get the flu vaccine.

### What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus and occurs every year, usually in winter. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, aching muscles, cough and sore throat – and because flu is a virus, antibiotics won't help. People sometimes call a bad cold the flu, but having flu is much worse.

### What harm can flu do?

Flu can be a nasty experience for those who are usually fit and well. It can lead to serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia. The elderly and those with underlying conditions are more likely to experience serious complications and need to be admitted to hospital. In some cases flu can result in being admitted to intensive care or even death.

Flu infection during pregnancy can also have serious consequences for both mother and baby.

For further information see the leaflet *Flu is more serious than you think - Get the flu vaccine to protect yourself and your baby*.

### Who should get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is offered to some groups who are at greater risk of serious flu and to others to reduce the amount of flu virus circulating.

The following people will be offered the vaccine:

- **Pregnant women.**
- **All children aged 2 up to and including age 16.**
- **Anyone aged 50 or over, even if they feel fit and healthy at the moment.**
- **Children aged 6 months to 2 years old and adults who have any of the following medical conditions:**
  - a chronic chest condition such as asthma or children (6m-2y) who have been admitted to hospital with a chest infection;
  - a chronic heart condition;
  - chronic liver disease;
  - chronic kidney disease;
  - diabetes;
  - lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroids or cancer therapy (people living in the same house as someone with lowered immunity may also need to be vaccinated);
  - a chronic neurological condition, such as stroke, multiple sclerosis or a condition that affects your nervous system, such as cerebral palsy;
  - are seriously overweight (BMI>40);
  - any other serious medical condition – check with your doctor if you are unsure.

- **Anyone living in a residential or nursing home.**
- **Main carers for elderly or disabled people.**
  - you should seek advice from your GP surgery as to whether you should be vaccinated so you can continue to look after the person you care for. You should also ensure that they are vaccinated (if recommended).
- **Close contacts of immunocompromised individuals.**

### Vaccination for children aged from 2 up to and including age 16

Children aged from 2 up to and including those aged 16 will be offered a vaccine that is given as a spray into the nose. This vaccine has been used for many years in the UK. It has been shown to be effective in children and to have a very good safety record. A few children cannot receive this vaccine and will be offered the injected vaccine instead.

### Is the vaccine safe for pregnant women?

Yes. Pregnant women should get the vaccine regardless of their stage of pregnancy. They will be offered it by their GP or midwife.

The flu vaccine is licensed for use in pregnancy by the European Medicines Agency. There is a lot of evidence that flu vaccines are safe in pregnancy and for newborn babies. Since 2009, the UK and a large number of other countries have introduced routine flu vaccine programmes for pregnant women. Millions of pregnant women have received the seasonal flu vaccine and its safety has been carefully monitored.