



Public Health
England

NHS

Protecting your child against flu

Information for parents



Flu **i**mmunisation 2015/16

Helping to protect everyone, every winter

This year, the flu vaccine is being offered to:

- **children aged two, three and four years¹**
- **children in school years 1 and 2²**
- **children with a health condition that puts them at risk of flu**
- **children of primary school-age in some parts of the country**

This leaflet explains why these children are being offered the vaccination, as well as describing the disease and the vaccine.

¹ ie born between 1 September 2010 and 31 August 2013

² ie born between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2010

► **Why should children 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 often last several days.

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, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

► **Are all children being offered the vaccine?**

No. Last year, all children aged two, three and four years and school children in some areas were vaccinated. This year, we are extending the programme to include all children in school years 1 and 2. In future, the programme will move up through the school years.

► **Why are so many children being offered the vaccine?**

By offering the flu vaccination to as many children as possible, we help to protect them in time for the winter. As well as protecting these vaccinated children, the disease is less able to spread as easily, and so they also help to protect their younger brothers and sisters, and other family members including their parents and grandparents.

► **My child had the flu vaccination last year. Do they need another one this year?**

Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against strains of flu that may be different from last year. For this reason we recommend that even if vaccinated last year, your child should be vaccinated again this year.

► **How effective is the vaccine?**

Because the flu virus can change from year to year there is always a risk that the vaccine does not match the circulating virus.

During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains although last year it was not.

► **Has the nasal vaccine been used in other countries?**

Yes; it has been used safely in the US for many years and it was used in the previous two flu seasons in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.

► **What are the benefits of the vaccine?**

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness. It may also reduce the chance of others in your family getting flu from your child. 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.

Over the past two years the programme has been tested in a number of areas. In those areas less flu has been detected in all age groups of the population. This suggests that as well as protecting the vaccinated children other people benefited too.

► **How will the vaccine be given?**

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray.

► **Who will give my child their vaccination?**

Children aged two, three and four years will be given the vaccination at the general practice usually by the practice nurse. In some areas four-year-olds who have started school may be offered flu vaccination in school instead.

Children in school years 1 and 2, and all primary school children in some pilot areas, are likely to have the vaccination in school but in some areas this may be offered in other community health settings.

► **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. When your child comes into contact with the flu virus they will be less likely to get ill.

► Are there any side-effects of the vaccine?

Serious side-effects are uncommon. Children may commonly develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. This may last a few days.

The vaccine is absorbed 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.

► What about my child who has a health condition that puts them at risk of flu?

Children with certain health conditions, even if well managed, are at higher risk of severe complications if they get flu. These conditions include asthma, having lowered immunity due to disease or treatment, a heart condition, or a learning disability.

From the age of six months onwards these children should have a flu vaccination every year. Most of these children should have the nasal spray. For some children, the nasal spray is not suitable for medical reasons and it should not be given to children under the age of two. These children will be offered an injectable vaccine instead either at the school or through the GP.

If your child is not offered the vaccine in the school, it is important that you contact your GP to arrange an appointment.



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

Children should not have the nasal vaccine if they:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past three days (vaccination should be delayed until at least three days after the wheezing has stopped)
- are severely asthmatic, ie being treated with oral steroids or high dose inhaled steroids
- have a condition that severely weakens their immune system or have someone in their household who needs isolation

- have severe egg allergy. Most children with egg allergy can be safely immunised with nasal flu vaccine. However, children with a history of severe egg allergy should seek specialist advice. Please check with your GP
- 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 because of this, they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Children who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid household contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two 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 routine childhood vaccines. The vaccination can go ahead if your child has a minor illness such as a cold but may be delayed if your child has a fever.

* see the website at <http://xpil.medicines.org.uk> and enter Fluenz tetra in the search box for a list of the ingredients of the vaccine

► **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.

► **Can't my child have the injected vaccine that doesn't contain gelatine?**

The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children. It also reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other family members (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu.

The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce spread so effectively and so is not being offered to healthy children as part of this programme.

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.

Some faith groups accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to you. For further information about porcine gelatine and the nasal flu vaccine, see www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response

► What will happen next?

Your local healthcare team will contact you about the vaccination. Talk to your GP, practice nurse, your child's school nurse or your health visitor if you have any further questions.

Or you can visit www.nhs.uk/child-flu



5 reasons

to get your child vaccinated

- 1.** The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record
- 2.** The nasal spray is painless and easy to have
- 3.** Flu can be really serious, especially for children with medical conditions like heart disease and diabetes
- 4.** If your child gets flu you may have to take time off to look after them
- 5.** Protecting your child can stop flu spreading to other children and the family, especially babies and grandparents, who may be at higher risk from flu

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