



Public Health  
England

**NHS**

Information for parents

# Protecting your child against **flu**



**STAYWELL  
THISWINTER**

Flu **i**mmunisation  
in England 2017/18

Helping to protect  
everyone, every winter

Your child's  
age on  
31 August  
2017

# Is my child eligible for the flu vaccination ?

under **2**  
years of age

**NO**

Your child is not eligible unless they have a health condition that puts them at risk of flu (see page 7)

**2-3**  
years old

**YES**

Your child is eligible and will be offered flu vaccine at their GP surgery

**4-8**  
years old

**YES**

Your child is eligible and will be offered flu vaccine at their school\*

\*(apart from a couple of areas where it will be offered in primary care settings)

**9**  
years old  
and older

**NO**

Your child is not eligible unless they have a health condition that puts them at risk of flu (see page 7) or they are in one of the former pilot areas

**This year, the flu vaccine is being offered to:**

- **children aged two and three years<sup>1</sup>**
- **children in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3 and 4<sup>2</sup>**
- **children with a health condition that puts them at greater risk of flu**
- **all children of primary school-age in some parts of the country (in former pilot areas)**

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

<sup>1</sup> ie born between 1 September 2013 and 31 August 2015

<sup>2</sup> ie born between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2013

## **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. It may also 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 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.

Before the programme was offered nationally the delivery was piloted in a number of areas in England. In those areas, where all primary school age-children were offered the vaccine, less flu has been detected in all age groups of the population. This suggests that as well as protecting the vaccinated children other people in those communities benefitted too.

## **How effective is the vaccine?**

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against this unpredictable virus. Flu infects many people and each year causes severe illness and death particularly among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying health condition, even one that is well managed.

The effectiveness of the vaccine will vary from year to year, depending on the match between the strain of flu in circulation and that contained in the vaccine. In the UK the vaccine offered to children has provided good protection against flu since its introduction.

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

In 2017 all children aged two and three years old on 31 August 2017 and those in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3 and 4 are being offered the vaccine.

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

By offering flu vaccination to children during the autumn, we help to protect them in time for the winter. As well as protecting these vaccinated children, the infection is then less able to spread, and so it helps to protect their brothers and sisters, and other family members and friends including their parents and grandparents. The programme started in 2013 and is being gradually extended to older children.



## **It is less than 12 months since my child had their last flu vaccine. Should they have it again?**

Yes. Even if it is less than a year since the last vaccination, it is important to ensure your child is protected by having another one this year.

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

Children aged two and three years old will be given the vaccination at their general practice usually by the practice nurse.

Children in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3 and 4, and all primary school children in former pilot areas, will have the vaccination in school apart from a couple of areas of the country where it will be offered in primary care settings.

Children who are home educated will also be offered the vaccine, provided they are in an eligible school age group. Parents can obtain information about arrangements from their local NHS England Public Health Commissioning team. Details can be found at: [www.england.nhs.uk/about/regional-area-teams/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/about/regional-area-teams/)

## **How will the vaccine be given?**

For most children it is given as a nasal spray.

## **Can the vaccine cause flu?**

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

## So 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 flu viruses they will then be less likely to get ill.

## What about my child who has a health condition that puts them at greater risk from flu?

Children with certain health conditions, even if well managed, are at higher risk of severe complications if they get flu. It is therefore 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, and
- 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 against flu if they have a condition that affects the nervous system such as cerebral palsy.

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 vaccine. 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 years. These children will be offered an injectable vaccine instead either at the school or through the GP. If your child has any health condition listed on page 7 but is not 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.

### **Are there any side-effects of the vaccine?**

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

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.

### **When will the vaccine be given?**

For two and three year olds, your child's GP surgery should contact you about getting them vaccinated before the winter. If you haven't heard from their GP by early November, contact them directly to make an appointment.



For school-aged children a vaccination session will be held at school during the autumn term. Your child's school will provide details from the local healthcare team.

If your child is at school and has a health condition that puts them at increased risk from flu (see page 7), 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?**

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, or are on treatment, that severely weakens their immune system or have someone in their household who needs isolation because they are severely immunosuppressed



- 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 with anaphylaxis 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 the other 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.

## **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.

\*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.

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 good 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 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.nhs.uk/child-flu-FAQ](http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu-FAQ)

## **Where can I get more information?**

Visit [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](http://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.

# 5 reasons to vaccinate your child against flu



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

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**2. Protect you, your friends and family.** Vaccinating your child will help protect more vulnerable friends and family

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**3. No injection needed.** The nasal spray is painless and easy to have

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**4. It's better than flu.** The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record

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**5. Avoid costs.** If your child gets flu, you may have to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare

[www.nhs.uk/child-flu](http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu)