



Public Health  
England



# Protecting your child against flu

Information for  
parents



**STAY WELL  
THIS WINTER**

Flu mmunisation 2016/17

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

- **children aged two, three and four years<sup>1</sup>**
- **children in school years 1, 2 and 3<sup>2</sup>**
- **children with a health condition that puts them at greater risk from 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 2011 and 31 August 2014

<sup>2</sup> ie born between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2011

## **► Why should children have the flu vaccine?**

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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, acute bronchitis, and pneumonia.

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

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No. All children aged two, three and four years and those in school years 1, 2 and 3 are being offered the vaccine. The programme will be gradually extended to further school children in the future.

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

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By offering the flu vaccination to as many children as possible in 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.

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

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Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against the strains of flu that are likely to circulate this year and which 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?

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

The World Health Organization monitors flu globally and in February each year recommends the strains of flu virus that should be included in the flu vaccine for the forthcoming flu season in the Northern hemisphere. It takes from February through to August/September for vaccine manufacturers to produce sufficient quantities of the vaccine. Because the flu virus can change there is a risk that the vaccine does not match the virus that eventually circulates.

During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains.

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

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Yes; it has been used safely in the US for many years and over the last three years in the UK where millions of children have been successfully and safely vaccinated.

## ► What are the benefits of the vaccine?

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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 of 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 its' delivery was piloted in a number of areas in England. In those areas, where all primary school age-children were offered 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 benefited too.

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

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

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

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

Children in school years 1, 2 and 3, and all primary school children in former 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?**

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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.

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

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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?

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Children with certain health conditions, even if well managed, are at higher risk of severe complications if they get flu. 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.

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.

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. 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?

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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\*

\* 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



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?**

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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)?**

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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?

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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/publications/vaccines-and-porcine-gelatine](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccines-and-porcine-gelatine)

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



# 5 reasons

## to get your child vaccinated

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**1.** 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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**2.** The nasal vaccine is painless and easy to have

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**3.** Flu can be really serious, especially for children with medical conditions like heart disease and diabetes

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**4.** If your child gets flu you may have to take time off to look after them

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**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

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

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290552 12p 1.5M MAY (ANT)

First published June 2015. Revised May 2016

PHE publications gateway number: 2015056

Produced by Williams Lea for Public Health England