

The flu vaccination

Who should have it and why

HEALTH PROTECTION



Includes information for
children and pregnant women



Isle of Man
Government

Reilhtys Ellan Vannin

HEALTH PROTECTION

● Public Health Directorate

This booklet explains how you can help protect yourself and your family against flu this coming winter, and why it's very important that people who are at increased risk from flu have their free flu vaccination every year.

What is flu? Isn't it just a heavy cold?

Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter, which is why it's sometimes called seasonal flu. It's a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat. A bad bout of flu can be much worse than a heavy cold.

The most common symptoms of flu are fever, chills, headache, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness. Healthy individuals usually recover within two to seven days, but for some the disease can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

What causes flu?

Flu is caused by influenza viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs. And because it's caused by viruses and not bacteria, antibiotics won't treat it.

If, however, there are complications from getting flu, antibiotics may be needed.

How do you catch flu?

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, they spread the flu virus in tiny droplets of saliva over a wide area. These droplets can then be breathed in by other people or they can be picked up by touching surfaces where the droplets have landed.

You can prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and you can wash your hands frequently or use hand gels to reduce the risk of picking up the virus. But the best way to avoid catching and spreading flu is by having the vaccination before the flu season starts.

How do we protect against flu?

Flu is unpredictable. The vaccine provides the best protection available against an unpredictable virus that can cause severe illness.

The most likely viruses that will cause flu are identified in advance of the flu season and vaccines are then made to match them as closely as possible.

The vaccines are given in the autumn ideally before flu starts circulating. During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains.

What harm can flu do?

People sometimes think a bad cold is flu, but having flu can be much worse than a cold and you may need to stay in bed for a few days.

Some people are more susceptible to the effects of flu. For them, it can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, or can make existing conditions worse. In the worst cases, flu can result in a stay in hospital, or even death.

DID YOU KNOW?

Flu vaccines protect against the main types of flu virus most likely to be circulating

Am I at increased risk from the effects of flu?

Flu can affect anyone but if you have a long-term health condition the effects of flu can make it worse even if the condition is well managed and you normally feel well.

You should have the FREE flu vaccine if you are:

- pregnant

or have a long-term condition such as:

- a heart problem
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including bronchitis, emphysema or severe asthma
- a kidney disease
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment)
- liver disease
- had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)
- diabetes
- a neurological condition, e.g. multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy or learning disability
- a problem with your spleen, e.g. sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed
- are seriously overweight (BMI of 40 and above).

The list of conditions isn't definitive. It's always an issue of clinical judgement. Your General Practitioner (GP) can assess you to take into account the risk of flu making any underlying illness you may have worse, as well as your risk of serious illness from flu itself.

Who should consider having a flu vaccination?

All those who have any condition listed on page 6 and 7, or who are:

- aged 65 years or over
- aged 6 months to under 65 years in a clinical at risk group (see previous page)
- living in a residential or nursing home
- the main carer of an older or disabled person
- a household contact of an immunocompromised person
- a frontline health or social care worker
- pregnant (see next section)

By having the vaccination, paid and unpaid carers will reduce their chances of getting flu and spreading it to people who they care for. They can then continue to help those they look after.

THE FLU VACCINATION FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

I am pregnant. Do I need a flu vaccination this year?

Yes; all pregnant women should have the flu vaccine to protect themselves and their babies.

The flu vaccine can be given safely at any stage of pregnancy, from conception onwards.

Pregnant women benefit from the flu vaccine because it will:

- reduce their risk of serious complications such as pneumonia, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy
- reduce the risk of miscarriage or having a baby born too soon or with a low birth weight
- help protect their baby who will continue to have some immunity to flu during the first few months of its life
- reduce the chance of the mother passing infection to her new baby.

I am pregnant and I think I may have flu. What should I do?

If you have flu symptoms you should talk to your doctor urgently, because if you do have flu there is a prescribed medicine that might help (or reduce the risk of complications), but it needs to be taken as soon as possible after the symptoms appear.

Note: You can get the free flu vaccine from your General Practitioner (GP), or from your pharmacist.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need another one this year?

Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against the strains of flu that are likely to be present and may be different from those circulating last year. For this reason we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

In addition protection from the flu vaccine may only last about six months so you should have the flu vaccine each flu season.

I think I've already had flu, do I need a vaccination?

Yes; other viruses can give you flu-like symptoms, or you may have had flu but because there is more than one type of flu virus you should still have the vaccine even if you think you've had flu.

What about my children? Do they need the vaccination?

If you have a child over six months of age who has one of the conditions listed on page 6, they should have a flu vaccination. All these children are more likely to become severely ill if they catch flu, and it could make their existing condition worse.

Talk to your GP about your child having the flu vaccination before the flu season starts.

The flu vaccine does not work well in babies under six months of age so it is not recommended. This is why it is so important that pregnant women have the vaccination - they will pass on some immunity to their baby that will protect them during the early months of their life.

For most eligible children, the vaccine will be given as a mist spray in each nostril. This is a very quick and painless procedure.

For more information on children and flu vaccination speak to your GP or Practice Nurse.

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 an illness that causes a fever.

Children may not be able to have the nasal vaccine if they:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past three days, they should be offered a suitable injected flu vaccine to avoid delay in protection
- have needed intensive care due
 - to asthma or*
 - egg allergic anaphylaxis*
- 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
- 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.

Also, children who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid close contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two weeks following vaccination. This is because there's an extremely remote chance that the vaccine virus may be passed to them.

** children in these two groups are recommended to seek the advice of their specialist and may need to have the nasal vaccine in hospital.*

*** 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.

If your child is aged between 6 months and 2 years old and is in a high-risk group for flu, they will be offered an injected flu vaccine as the nasal spray is not licensed for children under the age of two.

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.

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

Not all flu vaccines are suitable for children. Please make sure that you discuss this with your nurse, or GP, beforehand.

Which type of flu vaccine should I have?

There are several types of flu vaccine. You will be offered one that is most effective for you, depending on your age, from the following:

- children aged 2 to 17 in an eligible group are offered a live attenuated quadrivalent vaccine (LAIV), given as a nasal spray
- adults aged 18 to 64 who are either pregnant, or at increased risk from flu because of a long-term health condition, are offered a quadrivalent vaccine. The vaccine offered will have been grown either in eggs or cells (QIVe or QIVc) - both of which are considered to be equally effective.
- adults aged 65 and over will be offered either an adjuvanted trivalent injected vaccine grown in eggs (aTIV) or a cell grown quadrivalent injected vaccine (QIVc). Both vaccines are considered to be equally effective.

If your child is aged between 6 months and 2 years old, and is in a high-risk group for flu, they will be offered an injected flu vaccine as the nasal spray is not licensed for children under the age of two. All children over the age of 2 who are in a high-risk group will also need to have the injected vaccine if the live attenuated quadrivalent vaccine is not suitable for them.

Is there anyone who shouldn't have the vaccination?

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 are allergic to 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. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.

Will I get any side effects?

Side effects of the nasal vaccine may commonly include a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness and some loss of appetite. Those having the injected vaccine may get a sore arm at the site of the injection, a low grade fever and aching muscles for a day or two after the vaccination. Serious side effects with either vaccine are uncommon.

Will the flu vaccine protect me completely?

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.

How long will I be protected for?

The vaccine should provide protection throughout this flu season.

What do I need to do now?

If you belong to one of the groups mentioned in this leaflet, it's important that you have your flu vaccination. The vaccines are normally available from late September or early October, depending on supplies. Speak to your GP or practice nurse, or alternatively your local pharmacist, to book a vaccination appointment and get the best possible protection.

The flu vaccine is free. So make an appointment to receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

Organisations wishing to protect their employees against flu (unless they are at risk) will need to make arrangements for the vaccinations to be given through their occupational health departments. These vaccinations are not available on the NHS and will have to be paid for by the employer.

If you are a frontline health or social care worker, find out what arrangements have been made at your workplace for providing flu vaccination. It's important that you get protected.

SUMMARY OF THOSE WHO ARE RECOMMENDED TO HAVE THE FLU VACCINE

- everyone aged 65 and over
- everyone under 65 years of age who has a medical condition listed on page 6, including children and babies over six months of age
- all pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy
- everyone living in a residential or nursing home
- everyone who cares for an older or disabled person
- household contacts of anyone who is immunocompromised
- all frontline health and social care workers.

For advice and information about flu vaccination, speak to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist.

Don't wait until there is flu outbreak this winter - get your free flu vaccination.



It is best to have the flu vaccination in the Autumn **before** any outbreaks of flu.

Remember that you need it **every year**, so don't assume you are protected because you had one last year.

Further information

For advice and information about the flu vaccination,
speak to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist

[gov.im/vaccinations](https://www.gov.im/vaccinations)

[gov.im/flu](https://www.gov.im/flu)

**The information in this leaflet can be provided in
large format or in audio format on request**

The information in this leaflet has been adapted with kind permission from Public Health England.

© Crown Copyright 2019 - 3079111D 1p 400k Aug 2019.



Isle of Man
Government

Reilrys Ellan Vannin

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Public Health Directorate

Cronk Coar, Noble's Hospital, Strang, Douglas, Isle of Man, IM4 4RJ.

Telephone: 01624 642639 | Email: publichealth@gov.im

[gov.im/publichealth](https://www.gov.im/publichealth)