

Protecting your child against flu

Vaccination for
your toddler or
pre-school child



2025

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The annual flu vaccination programme now includes all children from the age of 2 up to and including the fifth year of secondary school (Year 12).

In the autumn of 2025 the following children will be offered the flu vaccine:

- All pre-school children who are aged two years or over on 1 September 2025. These children will be offered the vaccine at their GP surgery.
- All primary school children and those up to and including the fifth year of secondary school (Year 12). These children will be offered the vaccine at school by the school health service.

This leaflet explains the benefits of flu vaccination for your toddler or pre-school child.

Why is my child being offered the flu vaccine?

Vaccinating your child will help protect them against infection with the flu virus and also reduce further spread to others. This helps to protect their brothers, sisters and other family members such as you or their grandparents as well as their friends. Fluenz® is the name of the flu vaccine that will be offered to most children. The vaccine has been shown to be very effective and should help to prevent the spread of flu.

Flu and COVID-19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a virus called the coronavirus, and it can be serious for some people. Other viruses such as flu can also cause serious illness and if people get both COVID-19 and flu together, they could become

extremely unwell. So it is more important than ever that your child gets a flu vaccination every year.

What is flu like for children?

Children get the same unpleasant symptoms as adults – fever, chills, aching muscles and joints, headache and extreme tiredness. They can also have a stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. These symptoms can last between two and seven days. Some children have a very high fever, sometimes without classic symptoms, and need to go to hospital for treatment.

Complications arising from flu can include bronchitis and pneumonia, which both affect the lungs, and a painful middle ear infection. In severe cases, which are very rare, flu can lead to disability and even death. Younger children are more at risk and more likely to end up in hospital.

For children with some pre-existing medical conditions, getting flu can be very serious as it is likely to lead to serious complications.

Why do we need to protect ourselves and our children against flu?

The flu virus spreads quickly and infects adults and children very easily, causing an unpleasant illness that may result in days spent in bed rather than at work, nursery, school or doing usual day-to-day activities.

The virus spreads through the air when people cough and sneeze without covering their nose and mouth. Other people then breathe in the virus directly or pick it up by touching surfaces on which it has landed. Because young children don't always cover their noses or mouths when coughing or sneezing, they can spread the virus very quickly.

What vaccine will my child receive?

Fluenz[®] is the name of the vaccine that will be offered to most children. It has been available in the UK for the past ten years and has been shown to be more effective than other flu vaccines in children aged 2 to 17 years.

How will the vaccine be given?

Unlike most vaccines, Fluenz[®] is not injected into the arm or thigh. It is given as a spray up each nostril. The child can breathe normally while the vaccine is being administered. There is no need to actively inhale or sniff.

For medical reasons a very small number of children will not be able to receive Fluenz[®]. They will be given a different flu vaccine by injection instead.

Where will my child get Fluenz[®]?

Toddlers and pre-school children will be offered the vaccine at their GP surgery. Check with the practice to see what their arrangements are.

My child isn't yet 2 years old. Why aren't they getting the vaccine?

Fluenz[®] can only be used in children from their second birthday. However, if your child is in a 'risk group' for flu, then he or she can get the injected vaccine earlier – speak to your GP or nurse.

I've heard that Fluenz[®] is live. Does this mean my child will get the flu?

No. Fluenz[®] contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent it causing flu but help your child build up immunity in the same way as a natural infection (but without the nasty symptoms). For this reason, the live Fluenz[®]

vaccine is more effective than the injected vaccines, particularly in young children.

Individuals with weakened immune systems, however, may not be able to cope with the weakened live viruses in Fluenz[®]. Therefore if your child has a weakened immune system, it is important to tell this to the person giving the vaccine. These children still need to be vaccinated, but will be offered the injected vaccine.

Will there be any side effects of Fluenz[®]?

Fluenz[®] is a very safe vaccine. A runny or stuffy nose is the most common side effect following the nasal spray.

Fluenz[®] is absorbed very quickly, so even if your child gets a runny nose or sneezes immediately after the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked. Full details about the vaccine, including the side effects are provided in the Fluenz[®] patient information leaflet (PIL).

Visit www.medicines.org.uk/emc and type in 'Fluenz'.

Are there any children who shouldn't have Fluenz[®]?

- Children whose immune systems are severely weakened due to certain conditions or medical treatments should not have Fluenz[®].
- Also, your child should not have Fluenz[®] if he or she has had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or any of the substances included in it. Tell the person giving the vaccine about any allergies your child has, so they can decide which is the most suitable vaccine.

- If your child is taking salicylates, including acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin), they should not receive Fluenz®.
- **Fluenz® is not recommended for children with active wheezing at the time of vaccination or in the three days before the vaccination, or children who have very severe asthma.**

It is very important you tell the person giving the vaccine if your child has been wheezy in the previous three days.

There are alternative flu vaccines available. Please speak to your GP for advice as it is important that they are vaccinated.

Also, people with very severely weakened immune systems, for example those needing treatment in isolation units, should avoid close contact with vaccinated children for two weeks because there is a very remote chance that the weakened vaccine virus may be passed onto them.

Can children with an egg allergy still get the vaccine?

Most children with an egg allergy can get the Fluenz® vaccine. It is only those who have had the most severe form of allergic reaction – an anaphylactic reaction that they were admitted to intensive care for – who can't be given it. Discuss any allergy that your child has with the nurse or doctor so that they can decide the best vaccine to give.

Will my child be protected for life when they've had Fluenz®?

No. The flu virus can change every year and a new vaccine has to be made to match it. So next

year's vaccine may contain different flu viruses from this year's vaccine. This is why the vaccine is offered every year.

Does Fluenz® contain ingredients that come from pork? What does that mean for children from some faith groups?

Fluenz® vaccine contains a very small amount of gelatine that comes from pork. Gelatine is commonly used in a range of medicines. It is highly purified and used to stabilize the vaccine. A number of religious leaders have stated that it is acceptable to have this in a medicine form. However, it is up to individuals to decide if they find this acceptable for their child. If you don't wish your child to have this vaccine, you can request the injected form, which doesn't contain pork gelatine – please make sure you tell the person giving the vaccine.

Summary of reasons why your child should have the Fluenz® vaccination:

- It offers protection against those strains of flu virus that are most likely to be circulating each winter – protecting your child against a nasty disease that could require treatment in hospital.
- It helps reduce the spread of flu and helps protect those most at risk of its complications.
- It helps reduce the risk of parents and carers having to take time out of work to look after ill children.
- It has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record.
- It's quick and painless.

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

www.pha.site/flu

This leaflet is available in other formats and languages. For further details visit

www.publichealth.hscni.net



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