



UK Health  
Security  
Agency



# Protect yourself against flu

Flu immunisation in England

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Information for those in secondary school



Flu  mmunisation

Helping to protect you against flu

## Flu vaccine is offered free to:

Children aged  
2 or 3 years old

(on 31 August before  
flu vaccinations start  
in the autumn)



All primary  
school-aged  
children

Some secondary  
school-aged  
children



Children with a  
health condition  
that puts them  
at greater risk  
from flu

Further information on which children are eligible each year can be found at: [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu)

## **Why should I have the flu vaccine?**

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Flu can be a very unpleasant illness causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can last several days or more. Some people develop complications and need to go to hospital for treatment.

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

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Having the vaccine will help protect you from what can be a very nasty illness. It can help you avoid having to miss out on the things you enjoy and disruption to your education.

## **Why are so many young people being offered the vaccine?**

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The vaccine will help protect you against flu and reduces the chance of you spreading flu to others so in turn helps protect your family and friends.

It will help to reduce flu levels in the population in the winter when there may be pressure on the NHS with COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses in circulation.

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

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Yes; flu viruses change every year so the vaccine may be updated. For this reason, we recommend that you are vaccinated against flu again this year, even if vaccinated last year.

## How will the vaccine be given?

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It is usually given as a nasal spray.

## So 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 you to build up immunity.

The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if you sneeze immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

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

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You may develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. However, these are much less serious than developing flu and its complications. Serious side-effects are uncommon.

## What if I am not feeling well on the day?

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The vaccination may be delayed if you have a fever. Also, if you have a heavily blocked or runny nose, it might stop the vaccine getting into your system. In this case, the flu vaccination can be postponed until your nasal symptoms have cleared up. Sometimes an injected vaccine may be offered instead.



## What about those young people who have a long-term health condition?

If you have a health condition that puts you at higher risk of serious complications from flu, you should have the flu vaccine every year. If you have one of these health conditions and are not in one of the groups being offered flu vaccine at school, you can also ask your GP surgery to give you the vaccine. You can also ask your GP surgery to do this if, for example, you don't want to wait until the school vaccination session.

### Long term health conditions that put you more at risk from flu

#### These conditions include:

- serious breathing problems, such as asthma needing regular use of steroid inhaler or tablets
- serious heart conditions
- kidney or liver disease
- diabetes
- weakened immune system as a result of a condition or treatment with medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- problems with the spleen, for example, sickle cell disease, or the spleen has been removed
- learning disability
- problems with the nervous system, such as cerebral palsy



Visit [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu) for more information

## **Are there any young people who shouldn't have the nasal vaccine?**

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The nasal spray vaccine is offered to young people as it is more effective in the programme than the injected vaccine. However, some young people with long term health conditions may not be able to have the nasal vaccine (see details below). Your parents will be given a consent form to complete ahead of the vaccination, which will include questions to check whether it is suitable for you. They can speak with the school immunisation team if they have any questions. If you cannot have the nasal spray, you will be offered an injectable flu vaccine.

## **Who shouldn't have the nasal vaccine?**

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Instead of the nasal spray vaccine, you should have an injected flu vaccine if you:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past 72 hours
- have a very weakened immune system or someone in your household needs isolation because they are severely immunosuppressed
- have a condition that needs salicylate treatment
- have had an anaphylactic reaction to a flu vaccine, or any of the components, in the past (other than egg)

Young people who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid close contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems (for example those who have just had a bone marrow transplant) for around 2 weeks following vaccination. If contact is likely or unavoidable then an alternative flu vaccine should be given.

If you're not sure, check with the school immunisation team, or the nurse or GP at your surgery.

## **Your parents should seek the advice of your specialist, if you have:**

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- had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to egg in the past that required intensive care treatment
- asthma that's being treated with steroid tablets or required intensive care treatment in hospital

## **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.

The nasal vaccine is offered to children and young people as it is more effective in the programme than the injected vaccine. This is because it is easier to administer and considered better at reducing the spread of flu to others, who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. However, if you are at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine you should have the flu vaccine by injection. For those who may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products, an alternative injectable vaccine is available. Your parents should discuss the options with the school immunisation team.

# 5 reasons to have the flu vaccine

## 1. Protect yourself.

The vaccine will help protect you against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia

## 2. Protect your family and friends.

Having the vaccine will help protect more vulnerable friends and family

## 3. No injection needed.

The nasal spray is painless and easy to have

## 4. It's better than having flu.

The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions worldwide and has an excellent safety record

## 5. Avoid lost opportunities.

If you get flu, you may be unwell for several days and not be able to do the things you enjoy

### Where can I get more information?

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Visit [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](https://www.nhs.uk/child-flu) for more information. Talk to the school immunisation team, your GP, or practice nurse if you have any further questions.



[www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations)