

Flu vaccination FAQs

The following document is a set of questions and answers around the 2020/2021 flu vaccination programme.

What is flu?

Flu is an unpleasant disease that spreads quickly and easily through coughing and sneezing. Flu can also give you headaches, a sore throat, fever, chills, and muscle and joint aches. Those people who are at risk, either because of their age or medical conditions, may develop complications such as chest infections and pneumonia.

Why get the vaccine?

The vaccine provides the best available protection against flu. It is not 100% effective but it will protect a significant number of people and reduce the severity of flu if you get it. It could also help your relatives or carers because you will not be passing the disease to them.

Who is eligible to get a flu vaccine?

- anyone aged 65 and over
- pregnant women
- children and adults aged 6 months to 65 years with an underlying health condition (such as long-term heart or respiratory disease, weakened immune system or have a learning disability)
- carers
- people living in long stay residential care homes
- Those on the NHS Shielded Patient List
- people living with someone who's at high risk from coronavirus (on the NHS shielded patient list)
- children aged 2 and 3 on 31 August 2020
- children in primary school
- children in year 7 (secondary school)
- People aged 50 to 64 without a long-term condition

I am not in an at risk group, can I still get a flu vaccine?

Yes of course! If you would like to have a flu vaccine you can pay to have one at your local pharmacy, but you should do this later in the year to ensure those at risk are able to have theirs first.

I've heard that the vaccination can give you flu. Is that true?

No; the flu vaccine that is given to adults is made from dead flu virus and cannot cause the infection. The flu vaccine that will be given to most children is a live vaccine, but the viruses in it have been weakened so they can not cause flu. You may get some side effects after the vaccination but these are quite mild like a slightly

raised temperature or aching muscles for a couple of days or an ache in the arm where the injection was given. Other reactions are very rare.

When can I get the vaccine?

You can get the vaccination either at your GP practice or local pharmacy.

Will the flu vaccine protect me against Covid-19?

Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against Covid-19, however, it can help keep you safe from getting the flu, which in turn will help you stay healthy and well.

I think I have coronavirus symptoms – should I still come in for a vaccination?

The symptoms of coronavirus are:

- A new continuous cough
- A high temperature
- A loss of taste and/or smell

If you have any of these symptoms, then do not attend your flu vaccination appointment. This can be rescheduled.

If you have these symptoms you need to self-isolate and book in for a coronavirus test. You can do this by calling 119 or visiting NHS.uk. You can also order a home-testing kit.

Why are people who live with those on the NHS shielded patient list being offered a flu vaccine?

The NHS wants to keep those, who are most vulnerable to Covid-19, well this winter and does not want them to catch flu. If you live with someone who's on the NHS shielded patient list, or you expect to be with them on most days over winter, then you should ask for a free flu vaccine.

How long will the vaccine protect me for?

The flu vaccine will provide protection for you for the upcoming flu season. People eligible for flu vaccination should have the vaccine each year.

How long does it take for the vaccine to become effective?

It takes between 10 and 14 days for your immune system to respond fully after you have had the flu vaccine.

I had the vaccination last year, do I need it this year?

Yes. The viruses that cause flu can change every year, which means the flu (and the vaccine) this winter may be different from last winter.

When is the best time to get the vaccination?

The best time to have a flu vaccine is in the autumn, before flu starts circulating. But even if it's later, it's always worth getting vaccinated.

Do I need to wear a face covering or mask when I get the vaccination?

Yes, it is likely that you will need to have a mask on when you have your vaccine. Your GP practice will be able to advise when you book.

Are children offered a nasal spray vaccination?

Yes. Children aged 2 and 3 will be given the vaccination at their GP surgery, usually by the practice nurse.

Children who are 4 years old are also eligible for flu vaccination provided they were 3 on 31 August 2020. These children should be offered the vaccination at their GP surgery.

I've already had the flu this autumn so I don't need the vaccination

It's still important to get your flu vaccine even if you have had flu this autumn. It can help protect you from getting it again.

I'm pregnant; will the flu jab affect my baby?

It's safe to have at any stage of pregnancy, including in the first trimester and right up to the expected due date.

It helps protect the mother-to-be and newborn baby from catching flu.

Can flu be treated with antibiotics?

No unfortunately when you have flu, antibiotics will not help you feel better.

I am taking antibiotics, can I have the vaccine?

Yes, it's fine to have the flu vaccine while you're taking a course of antibiotics, provided you're not ill with a high temperature.

Why is the flu vaccine so important this year?

COVID-19 is still circulating, and we expect co-circulation with flu this season. In order to protect the NHS and social care services, it is important to minimise the number of people becoming unwell with flu this winter so it is more important than ever to have the flu vaccination. Flu can develop into a serious illness that requires hospitalisation and add to the pressure on the NHS and social care when they may also be dealing with cases of COVID-19. New research from PHE suggests that co-infection of both flu and COVID-19 is associated with a greater risk of more severe illness and death.

What are the first signs of flu and are they different to COVID-19?

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a sudden fever – a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- a dry, chesty cough
- a headache
- tiredness and weakness

- chills
- aching muscles
- limb or joint pain
- diarrhoea or abdominal pain
- nausea and vomiting
- a sore throat
- a runny or blocked nose
- sneezing
- loss of appetite
- difficulty sleeping

The symptoms are similar for children and adults, but children can also get pain in their ear and appear less active.

COVID-19 symptoms are: a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.

How can flu be treated?

You can treat flu symptoms yourself to help faster recovery, by:

- resting and sleeping well
- keeping warm
- taking paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower your temperature and treat aches and pains
- drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration (urine should be light yellow or clear)

Will wearing a mask protect me from flu?

Face coverings help reduce the transmission of respiratory viruses like coronavirus (COVID-19) that are spread through coughing and sneezing. They are largely intended to protect others, not the wearer, against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth and reduce the amount of virus spread through droplets when we sneeze or cough.

Measures in place to reduce transmission of COVID-19, such as face coverings, social distancing and hand washing will also help to reduce transmission of other respiratory viruses like flu.

My flu vaccine is due but I am self-isolating as I have COVID-19 (or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19). What should I do?

Do not leave home to get the flu vaccine if you have been asked to self-isolate. Rearrange your appointment for when your period of self-isolation is over.

Who should not have the flu vaccine?

Most adults can have the flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine injection if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs.

Ask a GP or pharmacist for a low-egg or egg-free vaccine.

If you're ill with a high temperature, it's best to wait until you're better before having the flu vaccine.