

# Influenza (Flu) Vaccination

## Important information

**Having a flu vaccination reduces your chance of catching flu, which protects you and the people who you come into contact with. Flu is around every year, usually in the winter. It is a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly.**

- The most common symptoms of flu are fever, chills, headache, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Healthy people usually get better within two to seven days, but 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.
- Serious complications can affect anyone, even healthy people. They are more common in babies under six months, older people, those with certain long-term medical conditions, and pregnant women. During pregnancy, the baby may be affected, causing premature birth or low birth weight.
- In the UK around 600 people a year die from complications of flu. In some years this can rise to over 10,000 deaths. Flu leads to hundreds of thousands of GP visits and tens of thousands of hospital stays a year.
- There are many flu viruses, and they are always changing. Each year a new flu vaccine is made to protect against three or four viruses that are likely to cause disease in the upcoming flu season. The vaccine protects against flu for around 6 months which is why you have to have a flu vaccine each year.

### **Can the flu vaccine give me flu?**

Flu vaccines **DO NOT CAUSE FLU**. Some people do sometimes feel ill after they have had the vaccine. This could be caused by a cold virus, it could be the bodies immune response to the vaccine or it could be flu caught before the vaccine is effective as it takes the flu vaccine 2 weeks to work fully.

### **If I have the vaccine does this mean I definitely won't catch flu?**

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus that can cause severe illness and death among at-risk groups but no vaccine offers 100% protection.

When flu is not completely prevented by vaccination, those who have received the vaccine may have some protection that could reduce the severity of their symptoms.

### **Will the flu vaccine stop me from getting any other viruses like colds or COVID-19?**

No. The flu virus only protects you against the flu virus, it does not protect against other respiratory viruses that often circulate during the flu season.

### **Are there any reasons not to have a flu vaccination?**

There are very few people who cannot receive any flu vaccine. But influenza vaccines should not be given to people who have had:

- **confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine**
- **confirmed anaphylactic reaction to any component of the vaccine**

Your healthcare provider will ask you questions to make sure it is safe to give you a flu vaccine and to make sure they give you the most effective vaccine for you.

If you are ill with a high temperature, it's best to delay having the flu vaccine until you have recovered. There's no need to delay having the flu vaccine if you have a minor illness with no high temperature, such as a cold. For children who are offered a nasal spray vaccine, the vaccination may be postponed if the child has a heavily blocked or runny nose as it might stop the vaccine getting into their system.

## Does the flu vaccine work if you are immunocompromised?

People who are immunocompromised or have a reduced ability to fight infections and other diseases, may not make a full immune response to the vaccine. The people they live with are also offered the vaccine to reduce their chance of catching flu and passing it on to the immunocompromised person.

## What are the common side effects from the flu vaccine and what should I do?

Flu vaccines have a very good safety record. There are several different flu vaccines and your healthcare professional will give you the vaccine which is most effective for you.

### Nasal vaccine

Side effects of the nasal vaccine may commonly include a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness and some loss of appetite.

If your child has a runny nose after their flu vaccination, wipe their nose with a tissue and then discard it. This is nothing to be concerned about.

Rest, plenty of fluids and pain killers can help if needed to treat side effects.

People who are given the nasal spray flu vaccine should avoid close contact with very severely immunocompromised individuals (such as bone marrow transplant recipients requiring isolation) for 1-2 weeks following vaccination as there is a theoretical potential for transmission of flu to immunocompromised contacts.

### Injected vaccine

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.

Try these tips to ease the discomfort:

- Continue to move your arm regularly; do not let it get stiff
- Take a painkiller, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen; if these medicines are safe for you to take

People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.

## Are there any serious side effects?

Serious side effects are uncommon, but if you are worried about yourself or your child, speak to your doctor, visit [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk) or call 111 or in an emergency call 999.

There is a very small chance of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to the ingredients contained in vaccines. Anaphylaxis usually develops suddenly and gets worse very quickly. It causes life-threatening breathing and/or circulation problems. The risk of anaphylaxis after a vaccine is very small, it occurs about once in every 1 million doses given.

Anaphylaxis is likely when **all** of the following three criteria are met:

- sudden onset and rapid progression of symptoms
- life-threatening airway and/or breathing and/or circulation problems
- skin changes (flushing, itchy rash, swelling).

If you see signs of a severe allergic reaction such as a red itchy rash with swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness), loss of consciousness **call 999 for an ambulance immediately.**

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