

Seasonal Flu

Important information about the seasonal flu vaccine



Flu
Protect yourself
and others

Will the vaccine protect me completely?



Most people who have the vaccine will not get flu. However, like any vaccine, it does not give 100% protection. The majority of people will be fully protected, some will get milder flu symptoms but a small number may still get flu.

How long will I be protected for?



The vaccine will protect you throughout this year's flu season. However, you need to get the vaccine every year to ensure you are protected from new flu strains which change every year.

When should I have the vaccine?



As soon as possible. It will be available from October 2011.

Where can I get the vaccine?



The vaccine is available free of charge to people in at risk groups from your GP practice. Please do not be complacent or wait until there is a flu outbreak this winter - book an appointment as soon as possible.



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To find out more about the flu vaccine, please contact your GP practice or visit www.nhs.uk

Please don't delay -
make sure you get the vaccine today to protect yourself and your loved ones.



Who should have the seasonal flu vaccine?

Seasonal flu happens every year, usually in the winter. It is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus and spreads easily from person to person. Flu is far more serious than a cold. Symptoms hit you suddenly and severely and usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles - you can often get a cough and sore throat at the same time.

A vaccine is available every year to protect those people who are most at risk of complications if they catch flu. The vaccination also helps prevent the spread of flu amongst at risk groups.

The vaccine is available free of charge to the following at risk groups:

- people aged 65 or over
- all pregnant women
- people who have long term health conditions. These include:
 - diabetes
 - a chest problem or breathing difficulties (such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema)
 - a heart problem
 - kidney disease or liver disease
 - a neurological condition (such as Parkinson's, motor neurone disease or cerebral palsy)
 - a low immune system due to disease (such as cystic fibrosis or Crohn's disease) or treatment (such as chemotherapy)
 - have previously had a stroke
 - a problem with the spleen (such as sickle cell disease) or if the spleen has been removed.

You should also have the vaccine if you:

- live in a residential or nursing home
- are a main carer.

Children with any of the conditions listed above or who have previously been admitted to hospital with chest or breathing problems should also have the vaccine.



Why is the vaccine so important?

Seasonal flu happens every year, usually in the winter. It's a highly infectious disease caused by a virus and spreads easily from person to person. The vaccine protects those people who are most at risk of complications if they catch flu.



Why are some people more at risk?

Some people are more at risk from flu (see list left) and need the vaccine because they are not able to fight off flu as easily as others. It can often result in serious complications, hospital treatments or more devastating consequences. This can be prevented by having the vaccine.



What does the vaccine protect against?

The vaccine will protect against three strains of the flu virus, including H1N1 strain which caused the swine flu pandemic in 2009 and which continued to circulate last winter. Every year, the most likely strains of flu that are expected to cause illness are identified in advance by the World Health Organization. The vaccine is then produced and made available in October.



How does the vaccine work?

There are NO live viruses and the vaccine CANNOT give you the flu. The vaccine works by tricking your immune system into thinking it has been infected with the flu virus so that it creates antibodies against it.

About a week to ten days after you have had the flu vaccine, your body starts making antibodies to fight off what it thinks is a virus in the vaccine. If you are then exposed to flu, your immune system will destroy the virus before it can cause any serious illness.



Is the vaccine safe?

Yes - the current manufacturing process for the flu vaccine has been used since the 1980s and is tried and tested. Although a new vaccine is produced each year (to cover the new virus strains which change every year), the process of the manufacture is the same and is safe.



Is there anyone who should not have the vaccine?

If you have had a serious allergy to the vaccine in the past or have a serious allergy to hens' eggs you may need to have an alternative version of the flu vaccine. This type of allergy is extremely rare, so please make sure you discuss this with your GP practice.

