

Flu Vaccination:

Protect yourself
and others



Introduction

Flu (influenza) kills thousands of people every winter. This leaflet explains who is most at risk from flu, and how you can protect yourself and others against flu this coming winter. It explains about seasonal flu and why it is important that people who are at risk have their free flu vaccination every year.

What is flu?

Flu is highly infectious, spreads easily and can cause serious illness.

A bad cold is not the same as the flu. Flu can be much worse and is caused by different viruses.

Seasonal flu occurs every year, usually in the winter season (that's why it is called "seasonal" flu).

The flu viruses that circulate change from one year to the next, so each year new vaccines are produced to try and match them. This gives people the best protection.

How do I know if I have the flu, and what should I do?

Flu symptoms hit you suddenly and can be severe. They can include fever, chills,

headaches and aching muscles, usually with a cough and sore throat.

Flu is caused by a virus and not bacteria, so antibiotics won't help. There are some medicines called antivirals that can be prescribed to those most at risk from flu and these may help if started within 2 days of the start of the illness.

If you are at increased risk (see page 4) and think you may have the flu, you should talk to your doctor urgently. If you do have flu the antivirals he or she can prescribe for you need to be taken very soon after the first symptoms appear.

If you get the flu and haven't had the vaccination yet this year you should have it as soon as the illness has gone. This will protect you against the other flu viruses which may be circulating.

Using a tissue when you sneeze or cough and then washing your hands helps to prevent the spread of flu.

What harm can flu do?

Many people who get flu are unable to work and may need to stay in bed for a few days.

For people who are fit and well flu may only result in mild symptoms or a short illness but



it can also cause more serious complications, such as bronchitis and pneumonia, that may need hospital treatment.

Some people are more at risk from flu and for them:

- It can make existing conditions worse.
- In some cases, it results in a stay in hospital.
- Flu can kill.

In a normal winter, thousands of people will die from flu related illnesses in the UK.

It is important that if you are in one of the risk groups (listed below), you have your free flu vaccine every winter.

Am I at greater risk from the effects of flu?

Even if you feel healthy experts recommend the flu vaccination if you have:

- A heart problem.
- A chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including asthma that requires regular steroid inhalers/ tablets.
- Kidney disease.

- Lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment).
- Liver disease.
- Had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA).
- Diabetes.
- A neurological condition, for example multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy or post-polio syndrome.
- A problem with your spleen, for example sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed.

Even if you are fit and healthy, you should have the seasonal flu vaccination if you are:

- Pregnant.
- Aged 65 years or over.
- Living in a residential or nursing home.



Carers

Those who provide care to people most at risk from flu should also be vaccinated. This will help protect them and the people they care for. So flu vaccination is also recommended for:

- The carer of an older or disabled person.
- Health or social care workers.

Don't wait until there is a flu outbreak this winter: contact your GP or practice nurse now to get your seasonal flu jab.

Pregnant women

All pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy, should have the flu vaccine. This is because even healthy pregnant women are at increased risk of complications from flu, which can cause serious illness both for the mother and her baby. This can result in a stay in hospital and can even be fatal. If a pregnant woman gets flu her baby is more likely to be born prematurely or with a low birth weight, be stillborn or die within their first week.

Vaccination of pregnant women provides protection for the woman and her baby during the pregnancy. It also protects the

baby against flu in the first 4-6 months of life when infection can be very serious.

Children

Children with any of the conditions listed on page 4, or who have previously been admitted to hospital with a chest infection should have a flu vaccination. The vaccine is suitable for children from 6 months of age and can be given at the same time as any of the routine childhood vaccines. Your GP or Practice Nurse will know which flu vaccines are suitable for children.

I have had flu vaccination last year. Do I need another flu jab this year?

Yes, if you are in a risk group for flu you need to be vaccinated every year.

Is there anyone who should not have the vaccination?

Only people who have previously had a serious allergic reaction to the flu vaccine or any of its ingredients cannot have a flu vaccination.

People who have an allergy to hens' eggs can still be vaccinated. If they have a serious



hens' egg allergy this should be done under specialist hospital supervision.

A runny nose, cough or other minor illness are not reasons to delay the vaccine.

If you are unwell with a high temperature, you should delay the vaccination until the temperature has settled.

How long will protection last?

Your body starts making antibodies to fight the flu viruses about a week to ten days after the injection. These antibodies help to protect you against flu viruses for up to a year.

The seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you against the common cold or other winter illnesses.

Will I get any side effects?

The flu vaccine is very safe. Some people may get a slight temperature, headache, tiredness or aching muscles for one or two days afterwards and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected. Other side effects are very rare.

The vaccination is quick and safe, and could prevent weeks of serious illness.

Will the flu vaccine give me flu?

No, the vaccine does not contain live viruses so cannot give you flu.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect me completely?

Most people who have the flu vaccine will not get flu this winter. Out of every 100 people who have the vaccine around 50-75 will be fully protected. Others may get flu but with milder symptoms.

What do I need to do next?

If you belong to one of the groups mentioned in this leaflet it is important that you have your flu vaccine. Speak to your GP practice about being vaccinated.

You can also get advice from your local pharmacist or NHS Direct Wales. It is best to have the flu vaccination in the autumn before any outbreaks of seasonal flu, but it can still be given after this. The vaccines are normally available from the beginning of October.



Where can I get more information?

Visit: www.nhs.uk/vaccinations or phone NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47**

You can also speak to your GP or practice nurse.

Additional copies of this leaflet are available from the Welsh Government Publications Centre by e-mail:

assembly-publications@wales.gsi.gov.uk

or by telephone on **029 2082 3683**
(between 08.00 and 17.00 Mon - Fri)

This leaflet is available on the Welsh Government immunisation website:

www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation

Any queries about this leaflet can be addressed to:

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