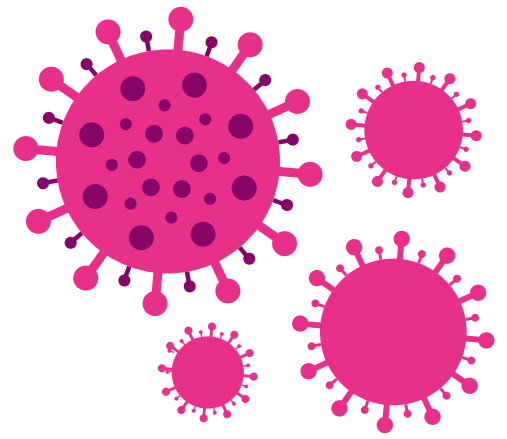


Help protect your child from flu this winter



This winter paediatricians are seeing high rates of flu cases in children and young people. It's important to remember that flu isn't just a bad cold, it can make children feel very poorly and lead to serious complications.

Every winter in the UK, thousands of children, even those without underlying health conditions, need hospital care because of flu.

Common symptoms include:

- A high temperature
- Aching muscles and joints
- Extreme tiredness
- Cold-like symptoms such as a runny nose, cough and sore throat
- In some cases, flu can lead to more serious problems like pneumonia or needing hospitalisation.

What can you do?

The best way to help protect your child is to get them vaccinated against flu. The flu vaccine is safe, effective, and offered free by the NHS. It not only helps protect your child from becoming seriously unwell but also helps reduce the spread of flu to others who may be more vulnerable, such as grandparents, babies, and those with long-term health conditions.

Who can get the flu vaccine?

In Northern Ireland the children's flu vaccine is offered every autumn to:

- Children aged two and over
- Go to primary school
- Children in Years 8 to 12 of post-primary school
- Children aged six months to two years and in a clinical risk group

Most children eligible for a flu vaccine can have the nasal spray, which is quick, painless, and effective. For medical reasons, some children will not be able to take a nasal spray. They'll receive the flu vaccine by injection especially if:

- they have a severely weakened immune system due to certain conditions or medical treatments
- they had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or any of the substances included in it, tell the person giving the vaccine about any allergies
- they take salicylates including acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin)
- have a history of active wheezing at the time of vaccination (within the last seven days)
- have severe asthma

If you're unsure which vaccine is suitable for your child, speak to your GP or school nurse.

Where to go?

- GPs will offer the vaccine to pre-school children. Ask the doctor's surgery about vaccination for your child.
- Primary school children and those up to Year 12 in secondary school will be offered the vaccine in school. To allow your child to be vaccinated, you need to sign and return a consent form to the school.
- If your child is absent or they need a second dose of the vaccine, the school will ask you to contact your child's GP.

Missed the appointment?

If you've missed your appointment, then contact your GP surgery to see if you can arrange a catch-up appointment.

How effective is the vaccine at preventing flu?

While the flu vaccine effectiveness varies year to year, depending on the match between the strain of flu in circulation and that contained in the vaccine, it will always offer a form of protection.

It also significantly reduces the severity of illness if you do get sick, lowering the risk of hospitalisation, intensive care admission and even death in high-risk groups such as the elderly and young children.

Does the vaccine cause flu?

No. The flu viruses in the injectable vaccine are inactivated and cannot cause flu. The nasal vaccine contains live viruses that have been weakened and cannot cause flu.

If my child was vaccinated last year, do I need to do it again?

Yes. You need to get your child vaccinated again this year, even if they were vaccinated last year. Flu viruses change annually, so a new vaccine is created each year to protect against the most likely circulating strains.

Are there side effects to the vaccine?

Side effects of nasal flu vaccine can include cold like symptoms, headache and feeling tired but this is not flu. The injectable flu vaccine can also cause side effects of a raised temperature or aching body, but this is not flu. The side effects from the vaccine are much milder than having flu disease.

Need more information?

www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/flu-vaccine-children#toc-1



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