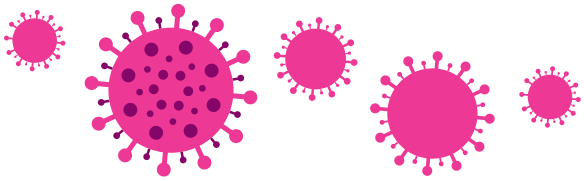
Northern Ireland

Help protect your child from flu this winter



Each winter paediatricians see many cases of flu 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 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. Flu vaccines are 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.

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Who can get the flu vaccine?

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

- All preschool children aged 2 to 4 years as of 1 September. Children can usually receive their flu vaccine through their GP surgery.
- All school-aged children up to and including Year 12. Children are usually offered their flu vaccine through the school vaccination programme. Parents and carers will be asked to complete a consent form.
- Children aged 6 months to under 18 years who are in a clinical risk group. Children can usually receive their flu vaccine through their GP surgery.

Most children eligible for a flu vaccine can have the nasal spray, which is quick, painless and effective. However, some children may be offered the injected flu vaccine instead, particularly if they:

- have a severely weakened immune system due to certain health conditions or medical treatments. Ask your GP for advice.
- have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the nasal spray vaccine or to one of its ingredients. Inform the person giving the vaccine about any allergies.
- are taking 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 are unsure which vaccine is suitable for your child, speak to your GP or school nursing service.

If your child is eligible and you have not heard about their vaccination, contact your GP surgery or your child's school. If your child misses their vaccination at school, or needs a second dose, contact your GP surgery to arrange vaccination.

How effective is the vaccine at preventing flu?

While flu vaccine effectiveness varies from year to year, depending on how closely the vaccine matches the flu strains in circulation, flu vaccines protect against more than one type of flu virus and can still provide important protection.

It can also significantly reduce the severity of illness if a child does get flu, helping to lower the risk of complications, hospital admission and intensive care treatment, particularly among young children and others at increased risk.

Does the vaccine cause flu?

No. The flu viruses in the injected vaccine are inactivated and cannot cause flu. The nasal spray 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?

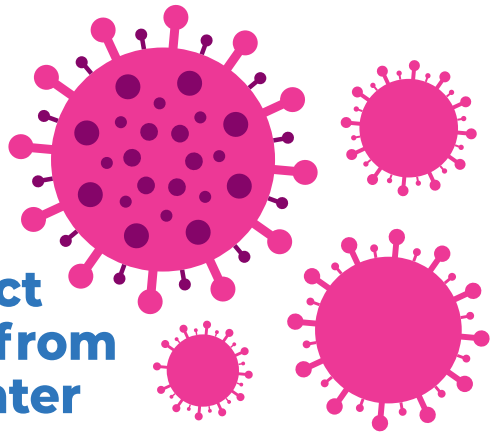
Yes. You need to get your child vaccinated again this year, even if they were vaccinated last year. Flu viruses change annually, so a new vaccine is created each year to protect against the most likely circulating strains.

Are there side effects to the vaccine?

Side effects of the nasal spray flu vaccine can include a runny or blocked nose, headache and tiredness, but this is not flu. The injected flu vaccine can also cause mild side effects, such as a raised temperature or aching muscles, but this is not flu. Any side effects from the vaccine are usually mild, short-lived and much less serious than flu itself.

Need more information?

https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/flu-vaccine-children



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