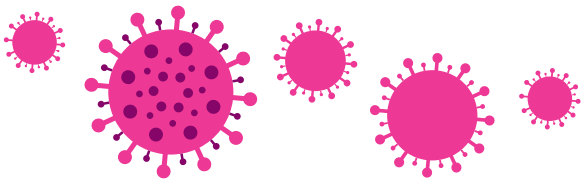
# Help protect your child from flu this winter



**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 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?

NHS Scotland offers the children's flu vaccine every autumn or early winter to:

- Children aged 6 months to 2 years with an eligible health condition. Parents and carers will receive a letter from NHS Scotland with details of an appointment or how to arrange one.
- Children aged 2 to 5 years who are not yet at school (children must be aged 2 years or over on 1 September of the vaccination year to be eligible. Children whose place at primary school has been deferred remain eligible for vaccination if they are over 5 years old). Parents and carers will receive a letter from NHS Scotland with details of an appointment or a phone number to call to arrange one. In some areas, child flu vaccinations may be delivered by local NHS immunisation teams in nursery settings.
- All primary and secondary school pupils (P1 to S6). Children are usually offered their flu vaccine through the school vaccination programme. Parents and carers should receive information from their child's school, including consent arrangements.
- Home-educated children and young people, and those not attending mainstream education. Parents and carers can arrange vaccination by contacting their local NHS board or vaccination team.

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 are aged 6 months to under 2 years and eligible for flu vaccination
- They have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the nasal spray vaccine, or to one of its ingredients
- They have a severely weakened immune system, or live with someone who does
- They have severe asthma, have recently experienced a flare-up of asthma symptoms, or are taking long-term steroid tablets
- They are receiving salicylate therapy
- They or their parents do not wish to have the nasal spray vaccine because it contains porcine gelatine

If you are unsure which vaccine is suitable for your child, speak to your GP, school nurse or local vaccination team.

**If your child is eligible and you have not received any information about their vaccination, or if they miss their appointment, contact your local NHS board or vaccination team for advice about arranging 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?

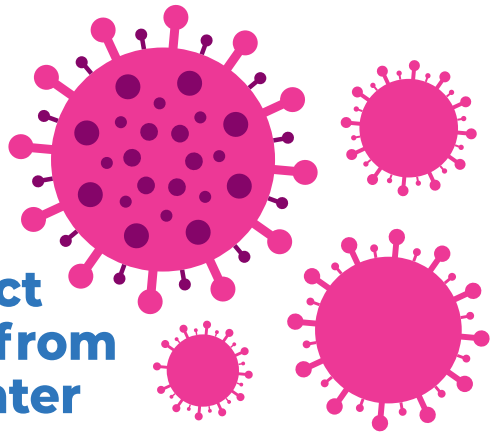
Yes. You need to get your child vaccinated again this year, even if they were vaccinated last year. Flu viruses change annually, so a new vaccine is created each year to protect against the most likely circulating strains.

## 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?

www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/immunisation/child-flu-vaccine/



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