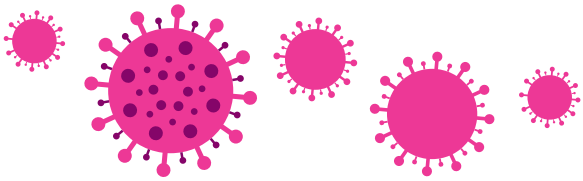
Help protect your child from flu this winter



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?

NHS Wales offers a free children's flu vaccine every autumn or early winter to:

- Children aged 2 or 3 years as of 31 August that year. Children will usually be invited by their GP surgery to receive their flu vaccine. In some areas, children may be offered their vaccination in nursery settings.
- Children and young people in Reception to Year 11. Children are usually offered their flu vaccine through the school vaccination programme. Parents and carers will receive information about the vaccine, along with a paper or digital consent form.
- Children and young people of Reception to Year 11 age who are not in mainstream education, including those educated at home or in alternative education provision. Children will usually be offered their flu vaccine through their GP surgery, unless alternative local arrangements have been made, such as vaccination through a community vaccination centre.
- Children aged 6 months and over with certain long-term health conditions that place them at higher risk from flu. Children may be invited by their GP surgery or offered vaccination through local NHS services.

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, especially 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 weakened immune system, or live with someone who does
- They have severe asthma, have recently experienced a flare-up of asthma symptoms, or have had wheezing within the last three days
- They are pregnant, have certain medical conditions, or are receiving treatments that mean the nasal spray vaccine is not suitable for them
- 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 or school nurse.

If your child is eligible and you have not received information about their vaccination, contact your GP surgery or local health board. If your child misses their flu vaccine, speak to their health visitor (if they are under 5 years old), school nurse or GP surgery about getting the vaccine.

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://phw.nhs.wales/knowledge-article/flu-vaccine/



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