

Influenza immunisation programme 2016/17

Factsheet for healthcare practitioners

Morbidity and mortality due to influenza can cause winter pressures within the healthcare system and major harm to individuals, particularly vulnerable people. The annual flu immunisation programme helps to reduce GP consultations, unplanned hospital admission, pressures on emergency departments and outbreaks in nursing and residential homes. It is therefore a critical element of the system-wide approach for delivering robust and resilient health and care services during the winter. Following a recommendation in 2012 by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the annual influenza programme has been extended to include children.

Extending the flu vaccination programme to healthy children aims to lower the impact of flu by providing direct protection to children and indirect protection to others. This will help to prevent cases of severe flu and flu-related deaths in older adults and people with clinical risk factors. In addition to clinical risk groups and children, vulnerable patients can be protected by the vaccination of health and social care workers. To date, uptake of flu vaccination by health and social care workers in Northern Ireland has been low and the Chief Medical Officer has highlighted the importance of increasing uptake rates among health and social care workers.

What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious, acute, viral infection of the respiratory tract. It is transmitted by the inhalation of infected droplets and aerosols and by hand-to-mouth/eye contamination from an infected surface. The incubation period is one to five days (average two to three days).

There are three different types of influenza virus:

- Influenza A causes epidemics and pandemics. This virus is found in many different animals and may spread between them. Birds, particularly wildfowl, are the main animal reservoir. The influenza A virus can live and multiply in wildfowl from where it can transmit to humans.
- Influenza B tends to cause less severe disease and smaller outbreaks. It is predominantly found in humans and the burden of disease is mostly in children.
- Influenza C causes minor respiratory illness only.

Who is affected by flu?

Flu can affect anyone, but it is more serious in babies, pregnant women, older people and those with certain underlying conditions.

What are the symptoms of flu?

In healthy individuals, flu is usually an unpleasant

but self-limiting illness with recovery in five to seven days. Common symptoms include the sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, myalgia (muscle aches) and severe fatigue. Sufferers can also experience a dry cough, sore throat and stuffy nose. In young children, gastrointestinal symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea may be seen.

Possible complications of flu

Common complications may include bronchiolitis, otitis media (middle ear infection) in children and sinusitis. Other less common complications include secondary bacterial pneumonia, viral pneumonia, meningitis and encephalitis.

Does the flu vaccine offer protection against all types of flu virus?

Flu viruses change continuously and the epidemiology of flu viruses circulating throughout the world is monitored by the World Health Organization (WHO). Each year WHO makes recommendations about the strains to be included in vaccines for the forthcoming winter. Trivalent vaccines used in Northern Ireland this year will offer protection against:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (H3N2)-like virus; and
- a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.

Quadrivalent vaccines will also offer protection against a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus.

What vaccines are available to use this year?

There are two different types of flu vaccines available to use in Northern Ireland this year:

Inactivated influenza vaccine (brands include Influvac, Aggripal, Fluarix Tetra and Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion BP)); and

Live attenuated intranasal vaccine (LAIV). Fluenz Tetra is the only brand currently available in Northern Ireland.

Note: Always check for contra-indications before administering a vaccine

School health delivery of flu vaccine programme

If you are delivering the flu programme in schools you will have the choice of two vaccines to use. Fluenz Tetra is the vaccine of choice for all children aged 2-17, unless the vaccine is contra-indicated. It is a quadrivalent vaccine that is administered intranasally. If Fluenz Tetra is contra-indicated in a child, (regardless of whether or not they are in a clinical risk category), then a quadrivalent vaccine called Fluarix Tetra is given to children over three years old. This vaccine has low ovalbumin content and can be given to children with an egg allergy that did not result in anaphylaxis requiring intensive care.

Who is responsible for vaccinating children?

The school nursing team will offer vaccination to all children P1-P7 regardless of whether or not they are in a clinical risk group. They will only visit the school once and there will be no mop-up visits. Other eligible children who are in one of the clinical risk groups but who do not attend primary school will be vaccinated in primary care. Children who miss the vaccine in school or require a second vaccine because they are under 9, are in a clinical risk group and have not previously received a flu vaccine, will receive their vaccine in primary care.

Vaccinating someone outside of the school health delivery programme

If you are vaccinating a child outside of the school setting, Fluenz Tetra is still the vaccine of choice for children age 2-17, unless contra-indicated. If the child is not able to receive Fluenz Tetra either because they are between six months and two years old or have other contra-indications, it is likely that they will still be able to receive an inactivated vaccine. Choice of inactivated vaccines available for use outside of the school delivery programme includes: Influvac, Aggripal and Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion) BP. Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion) BP has a low ovalbumin content and can be used on patients with an egg allergy that did not result in anaphylaxis requiring intensive care.

Egg allergy and severe egg allergy

In previous years an egg-free vaccine was available for use in adults with an egg allergy. This vaccine was called Optaflu and has not been produced this year by the manufacturer. **There is therefore no egg-free vaccine available for use in adults this year.**

Most flu vaccines are prepared from flu viruses grown in embryonated hens' eggs. The final vaccine product contains varying amounts of egg (as ovalbumin).

What vaccine should I use on a patient who has an egg allergy?

If a child or adult has a severe egg allergy which has previously required intensive care you should discuss with secondary care to consider vaccination in a hospital setting. It is extremely unlikely that this will be necessary for the majority of patients.

Adults with an egg allergy that does not require referral to secondary care can have flu vaccine administered in primary care using an inactivated flu vaccine with an ovalbumin content less than 0.12µg/ml, eg Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion BP).

Children aged 2-17 with an egg allergy that did not require referral to secondary care should be vaccinated using Fluenz Tetra, unless contra-indicated

for other reasons. This advice is based on JCVI recommendations and applies regardless of whether or not the child is in one of the clinical risk categories outlined in The Green Book. If Fluenz Tetra is contra-indicated then the child should be given a suitable inactivated vaccine with an ovalbumin content less than 0.12µg/ml, eg Fluarix Tetra (if over three years old) or Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion) BP (if over six months old). Note: Fluarix Tetra will only be available for use in the school delivery programme. Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Split Virion) BP will be available for use in primary care. One example of when Fluenz Tetra is contra-indicated is when a child has uncontrolled asthma. It is very important that this child is protected against flu as they are in one of the clinical at risk groups. The Green Book states that these children should receive an inactivated vaccine. Therefore if a child has uncontrolled asthma and an egg allergy that did not require intensive care, they should be offered an inactivated vaccine with an ovalbumin content less than 0.12µg/ml.

What vaccine should I use if the child is living in the same house as someone who is immunocompromised?

There is a theoretical potential risk of transmission of the live attenuated flu virus in Fluenz Tetra to very severely immunosuppressed contacts (for example bone marrow transplant patients requiring isolation) for one to two weeks following vaccination. In the US, where there has been extensive use of Fluenz Tetra, there has been no reported illness or infections from the vaccine virus amongst immunocompromised patients inadvertently exposed. Where close contact with very severely immunocompromised contacts (for example household members) is likely or unavoidable however, consideration should be given to using an appropriate inactivated flu vaccine instead.

Should immunocompromised children or staff be excluded from school when LAIV is being administered?

Excluding children or staff from school during the period when Fluenz Tetra is being offered is not necessary. The only exception to this would be if the person is extremely immunocompromised (for

example has just had a bone marrow transplant). These people are normally advised not to attend school/work because of the more definite and higher risk of them acquiring other infections.

Is it safe for a pregnant healthcare worker to administer Fluenz Tetra?

Yes pregnant healthcare workers can administer Fluenz Tetra unless they are severely immunocompromised. If this is the case they would then be excluded from work anyway.

Can a healthcare worker be exposed to vaccine virus when administering Fluenz Tetra?

Healthcare workers administering Fluenz Tetra may, theoretically, be exposed to the vaccine if it is accidentally released outside of the child's nose. In the US, where there has been extensive use of the vaccine over many years, transmission of the vaccine virus to healthcare workers has not been reported to date. The vaccine does not create an external mist and almost all the fluid is immediately absorbed into the child's nose (this explains why visible dripping from the nose is unusual). Healthcare workers who are pregnant or immunocompromised can safely administer the vaccine unless they are severely immunocompromised. Again severely immunocompromised staff would not be at work.

The virus in Fluenz Tetra is 'cold adapted', what does this mean?

A cold adapted virus is designed not to reproduce well at body temperature (37°C) so it will not replicate in the lungs but will reproduce at the cooler temperatures found in the nose (nasal mucosa). This allows the child to produce antibodies, which then protect against infection. By limiting viral reproduction to the nose, the more serious symptoms of flu are avoided.

How many doses of flu vaccine should be given?

One dose of vaccine should be administered regardless of whether or not the inactivated or LAIV

vaccine is given **unless the patient is a child under nine years who:**

- **is in a clinical risk group; and**
- **has not received flu vaccine before.**

These children should receive two doses of flu vaccine at least four weeks apart. If the first dose is given in school, then the second dose will be given in primary care. In subsequent years they can have a single dose as their immune system will already be primed. All other adults/children should receive only one dose of flu vaccine.

Note: The summary of product characteristics (SPC) for Fluenz Tetra states that for children who have not previously been vaccinated against seasonal influenza, a second dose should be given after an interval of four weeks. The JCVI has considered this issue and has recommended that as a second dose of the vaccine provides only modest protection, children who are not in a clinical risk group should be offered a single dose of Fluenz Tetra.

Healthcare professionals are reminded that in some circumstances, the recommendations regarding vaccines given in the Green Book chapters may differ from those in the SPC for a particular vaccine. When this occurs, the recommendations in the Green Book are based on our current expert advice from JCVI and this advice should be followed.

Which flu vaccine should be administered to all partially immunised children when Fluenz Tetra has expired?

In the event that eligible children who have previously received one dose of Fluenz Tetra require a second dose but all Fluenz Tetra has expired, a suitable inactivated vaccine should be used, keeping the minimum space of four weeks between vaccines. Note: Fluarix Tetra (quadrivalent inactivated vaccine used by school nursing teams) is only suitable for use in children over three years old. This is why it has only been supplied to school nursing teams in Northern Ireland.

What if someone is unwell on the day of vaccination?

If someone has an acute severe febrile illness, flu

vaccine administration should be deferred until they have recovered. Minor illness without fever or systemic upset is not a valid reason to postpone vaccination.

Does Fluenz Tetra contain latex?

Fluenz Tetra is supplied in a single use nasal applicator (type 1 glass) with nozzle (polypropylene with polyethylene transfer valve), nozzle tip-protector (synthetic rubber), plunger rod, plunger stopper (butyl rubber) and dose divider clip, none of which should affect latex-sensitive individuals.

Does Fluenz Tetra contain any preservatives such as thiomersal?

No - Fluenz Tetra does not contain any preservatives such as thiomersal.

Does Fluenz Tetra contain pork-derived ingredients?

Fluenz Tetra contains hydrolysed gelatin derived from pork as one of its additives. Gelatine is commonly used in a range of pharmaceutical products, including many capsules and some vaccines. The gelatin used in Fluenz Tetra is a highly purified product used to stabilize live viral vaccines.

If someone refuses Fluenz Tetra on the basis of religious belief, can they be offered the inactivated vaccine?

Yes, in Northern Ireland a suitable inactivated vaccine can be offered when Fluenz Tetra has been refused on the grounds of religious belief.

What is the shelf life of Fluenz Tetra?

Fluenz Tetra has a short expiry date of 18 weeks after manufacture. Expiry dates should be checked regularly and only the required amount of vaccines should be ordered. Please do not overstock. There is no shortage of Fluenz Tetra and Movianto will complete next day deliveries.

Is Fluenz Tetra effective?

Fluenz Tetra provides good overall protection for children against influenza virus and is expected to provide some cross protection against mismatched

strains. Using a live attenuated vaccine provides a better immune response. Vaccine effectiveness varies from year to year depending upon the circulating strains and the vaccine composition.

Following reports in the US of the low effectiveness of Fluenz Tetra, JCVI reviewed effectiveness data from the UK, Finland, Canada and the US. Most of the data demonstrates good overall effectiveness and JCVI continue to recommend the use of Fluenz Tetra and strongly support the continuation of the UK childhood influenza immunisation programme.

What happens if a child sneeze / develops a nasal drip / blows their nose following administration of Fluenz Tetra?

Administration of the vaccine does not need to be repeated. Binding of the virus vaccine to the epithelial cells occurs very rapidly and there are more virus particles in the vaccine than are needed to establish immunity. Reassurance should be provided that vaccine does not need to be given again.

What should happen if a child with heavy nasal congestion attends for vaccination?

The child can be offered a suitable inactivated vaccine if they have heavy nasal congestion that cannot be temporarily cleared by blowing their nose.

What should happen if only half of the Fluenz Tetra vaccine is administered (because the child refuses or moves away when vaccine is being administered)?

It is not necessary to repeat the vaccine as long as 0.1 ml (half dose) has been given.

Can Fluenz Tetra be administered to a child under two years old?

No. The vaccine is not licensed for use in children under two years old.

What should you do if Fluenz Tetra is inadvertently administered to a child under two years?

Fluenz Tetra is contra-indicated in all children under two years old due to an increase in adverse events in this age group. It is not licensed for use in children under two years old for this reason. Children under two who receive Fluenz Tetra do not require a replacement dose but the parents should be informed of possible adverse events in the short term and advised to seek medical advice if these occur. They should be reassured that no long-term effects from receiving Fluenz Tetra are anticipated. If the child is under two, is in one of the clinical risk groups and never previously received a flu vaccine, they should be offered an appropriate inactivated flu vaccine four weeks later.

Note: Healthcare professionals should report the administration error via their local governance system(s) so that lessons can be learnt and the risk of future errors minimised.

What should you do if Fluenz Tetra is inadvertently administered to a child who is immunosuppressed?

If an immunosuppressed child receives Fluenz Tetra then the degree of immunosuppression should be assessed. If the individual is severely immunocompromised, antiviral prophylaxis should be considered, otherwise they should be advised to seek medical advice if they develop flu-like symptoms in the four days (the usual incubation period) following administration of the vaccine. If antivirals are used for prophylaxis or treatment, then in order to maximise their protection in the forthcoming flu season, the patient should also be offered inactivated influenza vaccine. This can be given straight away.

Note: Healthcare professionals should report the administration error via their local governance system(s) so that lessons can be learnt and the risk of future errors minimised.

An individual can be considered severely immunosuppressed if they:

- are severely immunodeficient due to conditions or immunosuppressive therapy;
- have acute/chronic leukaemia;

- have lymphoma;
- are HIV positive and are not on highly active antiretroviral therapy;
- have a cellular immune deficiency;
- are taking a high dose of steroids.

Can Fluenz Tetra be administered at the same time as, or at any interval before/ after other vaccines?

Fluenz Tetra can be given at the same time as, or at any interval before or after other vaccines, including live vaccines. Although it was previously recommended that, where vaccines cannot be administered simultaneously, a four week interval should be observed between live viral vaccines, JCVI has now advised that no specific intervals need to be observed between the live attenuated intranasal flu vaccine and other live vaccines. See the [revised recommendations for the administration of more than one live vaccine](#)

What should you do if you inadvertently administer an expired dose of Fluenz Tetra?

Inadvertently administering an expired dose of Fluenz Tetra is unlikely to cause harm to the child, other than that the expired dose may not offer them adequate protection. Health professionals should inform the patient/carer of the error, provide reassurance where necessary and discount the expired dose. An additional dose of Fluenz Tetra that is in date should be offered as soon as possible (on the same day as the expired vaccine was given or as soon as the error was discovered), to ensure satisfactory protection. There is no minimum interval between an expired and a valid dose of Fluenz Tetra as it is the same product being administered. In the event that in date Fluenz Tetra is not available, a suitable inactivated flu vaccine should be administered as an alternative as soon as possible.

Note: Inadvertently administering an expired dose of Fluenz Tetra is an adverse clinical incident that should be reported via the local governance system(s), so that appropriate action can be taken, lessons can be learnt and the risk of future errors minimised.

Can Fluenz Tetra vaccine be administered with antiviral agents against flu?

There is a potential for flu antiviral agents to lower the effectiveness of Fluenz Tetra vaccine. If anti-virals have been given it is better to wait until 48 hours after completing anti-virals before administering Fluenz Tetra.

Why is it important to encourage pregnant women to get their flu vaccination?

There is good evidence that pregnant women are at increased risk from complications if they contract flu. In addition there is evidence that having flu during pregnancy may be associated with premature birth and smaller birth size and weight and the flu vaccine may reduce the likelihood of this happening. Influenza vaccination during pregnancy provides passive immunity against flu to infants in the first few months of life.

Can the flu vaccine be given at any stage during pregnancy?

Yes. A review of studies on the safety of flu vaccine in pregnancy concluded that inactivated flu vaccine can be safely and effectively administered during any trimester of pregnancy. No study to date has demonstrated an increased risk of either maternal complications or adverse fetal outcomes associated with inactivated influenza vaccine. The flu vaccine should be given for every pregnancy as the flu virus changes from one season to another.

How long does it take for the flu vaccine to become effective?

Immune response following flu vaccination takes approximately two weeks to develop. It is important to get vaccinated as early in the season as is possible as flu season can start early.

Can flu vaccines give you flu?

Fluenz Tetra could potentially cause flu in an individual who is immunocompromised which is why it is contra-indicated in this case. All other flu vaccines

are inactivated and do not contain live viruses. This means that they are not able to cause flu.

What should I do if a patient reports a serious reaction to the flu vaccine?

All serious reactions following flu vaccination should be reported to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency using the Yellow card scheme at <http://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>

Note: Fluenz Tetra and Fluarix Tetra carry a black triangle symbol and this is to encourage reporting of all suspected adverse reactions.

Where can I find information about groups who are eligible for flu vaccine?

Details of clinical risk groups and other groups can be found in annex 2 of the CMO letter.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/letters-and-urgent-communications-2016>

Vaccine fridge capacity

Please note that GPs should ensure that there is sufficient fridge capacity to store flu vaccines. It is very important to note that frequent delivery of vaccines can be made by Movianto and that there is no need to stockpile large quantities of vaccine.

Where can I get more information?

Seasonal Influenza (CMO letter) www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/letters-and-urgent-communications-2016

The Green Book influenza chapter www.gov.uk/government/publications/influenza-the-green-book-chapter-19

Training slides (includes flu) www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/directorates/files/Imms%20update%20training%202016final.zip

On-line training (Includes flu) www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/health-protection/immunisationvaccine-preventable-diseases

Primary Care Intranet (PGDs) primarycare.hscni.net/PharmMM_Resources_Clinical%20Resources_PGDs.htm

www.fluawareni.info

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