

Protecting your child against flu

Vaccination for
your toddler or
pre-school child



2016

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The annual flu vaccination programme has been extended in stages to include all children aged 2 to 11 years.

In the autumn of 2016 the following children will be offered the flu vaccine:

- All pre-school children who are aged two years or over on 1 September 2016 (ie children born between 2 July 2012 and 1 September 2014). These children will be offered the vaccine at their GP's surgery.
- All primary school children. These children will be offered the vaccine at school by the school health service.

This leaflet explains the benefits of flu vaccination for your toddler or pre-school child.

Why is my child being offered the flu vaccine?

Vaccinating your child will help protect them against infection with the flu virus and also reduce further spread. This helps to protect their brothers and sisters, and other family members and friends including their parents and grandparents. Fluenz Tetra®[®], which is the name of the flu vaccine that will be offered to children, is very effective and so the spread of flu should be reduced.

Why are children being offered the flu vaccine?

The new vaccine, Fluenz Tetra®[®], has been available in the UK for the past three years and is more effective than existing flu vaccines in children aged

2 to 17 years. The vaccine is administered as a spray up the nose, making it easier to give.

What is flu like for children?

Children get the same unpleasant symptoms as adults – fever, chills, aching muscles and joints, headache and extreme tiredness. They can also have a stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. These symptoms can last between two and seven days. Some children have very high fever, sometimes without classical symptoms, and need to go to hospital for treatment. Complications arising from flu can include bronchitis, pneumonia and painful middle ear infection. In severe cases, which are very rare, flu can lead to disability and even death. Younger children are more at risk and more likely to end up in hospital.

For children with some pre-existing medical conditions getting flu can be very serious as it is likely to make their condition much worse.

Why do we need to protect ourselves and our children against flu?

The flu virus spreads quickly and infects adults and children very easily, causing an unpleasant illness that may result in days spent in bed rather than at work, nursery, school or doing usual day-to-day activities.

The virus spreads through the air when people cough and sneeze without covering their nose and mouth. Other people then breathe in the virus directly or pick it up by touching surfaces on which it has landed. Because young children don't always cover their noses or mouths when coughing or sneezing they can spread the virus very quickly.

How will the vaccine be given?

Unlike most vaccines, Fluenz Tetra® is not injected into the arm or thigh. It is given as a spray up each nostril. The child can breathe normally while the vaccine is being administered. There is no need to actively inhale or sniff.

For medical reasons a very small number of children will not be able to receive Fluenz Tetra®. They will be given a different flu vaccine by injection instead.

Where will my child get Fluenz Tetra®?

Toddlers and pre-school children will be offered the vaccine at their GP surgery. Check with your practice to see what their arrangements are.

My child isn't yet 2 years old. Why isn't he getting the vaccine?

Fluenz Tetra® can only be used in children from their second birthday. However if your child is in a 'risk group' for flu, then he or she can get the injected vaccine – speak to your GP or nurse.

I've heard that Fluenz Tetra® is live. Does this mean my child will get the flu?

No. Fluenz Tetra® contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent it causing flu but help your child build up immunity in the same way as a natural infection (but without the nasty symptoms). For this reason, the live Fluenz Tetra® vaccine is more effective than the injected vaccines, particularly in young children.

Individuals with weakened immune systems, however, may not be able to handle the weakened live viruses in Fluenz Tetra®. Therefore if your child has a weakened immune system it is important to tell the person giving the vaccine. These children need to be vaccinated, but it should be with the injected vaccine.

Will there be any side effects of Fluenz Tetra®?

Fluenz Tetra® is a very safe vaccine. A runny or stuffed nose is the most common side effect following the nasal spray.

Fluenz Tetra® is absorbed very quickly, so even if your child gets a runny nose or sneezes immediately after the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked. Full details about the vaccine, including the side effects are provided in the Fluenz Tetra® patient information leaflet.

Visit www.medicines.org.uk/emc and type in 'Fluenz Tetra'.

Are there any children who shouldn't have Fluenz Tetra®?

Children whose immune systems are severely weakened due to certain conditions or medical treatments should not have Fluenz Tetra®.

Also, your child should not have Fluenz Tetra® if he or she has had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or any of the substances included in it. Tell the person giving your child the vaccine about any allergies your child has, so they can decide which vaccine is best for them.

If your child is taking salicylates including acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) they should not receive Fluenz Tetra®.

Fluenz Tetra® is not recommended for children with active wheezing at the time of vaccination or in the three days before the vaccination, or who have very severe asthma.

It is very important you tell the person giving the vaccine if your child has been wheezy in the previous three days.

There are alternative flu vaccines available, however, so speak to your GP for advice.

Also, people with very severely weakened immune systems, eg those needing treatment in isolation units, should avoid close contact with vaccinated children for two weeks because there is a very remote chance that the weakened vaccine virus may be passed to them.

My child is allergic to egg. What should I do?

Most children with egg allergy can get the Fluenz Tetra® vaccine. It is only those who have had the most severe form of allergic reaction – an anaphylactic reaction – who can't be given it. Discuss any allergy details with the nurse or doctor so they can decide the best vaccine.

Will my child be protected for life when they've had Fluenz Tetra®?

No. The flu virus can change every year and a new vaccine has to be made to match it. So next year's vaccine may contain different viruses from this year's vaccine. This is why the vaccine is offered every year.

Doesn't Fluenz Tetra® contain ingredients that come from pork? What does that mean for children from some faith groups?

Fluenz Tetra® vaccine does contain a very small amount of gelatine that comes from pork. Gelatine is commonly used in a range of medicines. It is highly purified and used to stabilize the vaccine. A number of religious leaders have stated that it is acceptable to have this in a medicine form. However, it is up to individuals to decide if they find this acceptable for their child. If you don't wish your child to have this vaccine you can request the injected one which doesn't contain pork gelatine – please make sure you tell the person giving the vaccine.

Summary of reasons why your child should have the Fluenz Tetra® vaccination

- It offers protection against those strains of flu virus that are most likely to be circulating each winter – protecting your child against a nasty disease that could require treatment in hospital.
- It reduces the spread of flu and helps protect those most at risk of its complications.
- It reduces the risk of parents and carers having to take time out of work to look after ill children.
- It has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record.
- It's quick and painless.

Translations in a range of regional and minority ethnic languages are available.

For further details visit www.publichealth.hscni.net or www.fluawareni.info



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

www.publichealth.hscni.net

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