



Protect yourself this winter

Get your free flu vaccine now

It's quick, safe and protects your loved ones too



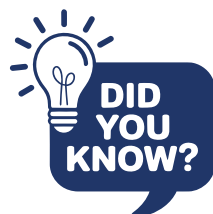
Public Health
Agency

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people across Northern Ireland choose to get their flu vaccine to protect themselves and those around them.

This leaflet highlights why it is important to get the flu vaccine.

Flu vaccine – the facts

- Flu can cause serious illness and hospitalisation.
- Antibiotics won't work on flu.
- The flu vaccine is free if you're eligible.
- The vaccine cannot give you flu.
- Protection starts about 10 days after vaccination.
- You need to get vaccinated every year.



What is flu?

Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter. It's a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly.

Flu can cause fever, extreme tiredness, aching muscles and joints, stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. Healthy people usually recover within 2 to 7 days, but for some, the disease can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

A cold is much less serious and usually starts gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat.

What causes flu and how do you catch it?

Flu is caused by viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs. And because it is caused by viruses and not bacteria, antibiotics won't treat it.

When someone with flu coughs or sneezes, the flu viruses can spread to other people through the air, or can be picked up by touching surfaces where the viruses have landed. You can prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze (ideally with a tissue or into the bend of your elbow), and you can wash your hands frequently or use hand gels to reduce the risk of picking up the virus.



But the best way to avoid catching and spreading flu is by having the vaccine before the flu season starts.

How serious can flu be for me and my family?

Flu can be a nasty experience for those who are usually fit and well. It can lead to serious chest infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia. Older people and those with underlying conditions are more likely to become very unwell and need to be admitted to hospital. In some cases, flu can result in being admitted to intensive care or even death.

Flu during pregnancy can also have serious consequences for both mother and baby.

By getting the vaccine, you will be helping protect those around you like young babies, older relatives and family members with weakened immune systems who are most vulnerable to severe flu.

Who should have the flu vaccine?

You should get your free flu vaccine if you are:

- over 6 months old and living with a long-term condition or weakened immune system that makes you at greater risk of the harms of flu (see www.nidirect.gov.uk/flu-vaccine for a list of conditions)
- living with someone who has a weakened immune system due to disease or treatment
- aged 65 years and over
- pregnant
- a child aged 2 up to and including age 16 (Year 12)
- a health or social care worker
- living in a residential or nursing home
- the main carer of an older person or person living with a disability
- employed at, or regularly visiting, poultry, cattle or swine farming or processing units
- a rough sleeper or staying in a homeless hostel



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I am pregnant. Do I need a flu vaccine this year?

Yes. Pregnancy can make it harder for your body to fight off infections such as flu. Flu increases the chances of pregnant women and their babies needing intensive care. Pregnant women can get the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy. You will be offered it by your GP or midwife.

The flu vaccine is licensed for use in pregnancy by the European Medicines Agency. Studies show that the flu vaccine is safe in pregnancy. Since 2009, the UK and a large number of other countries have introduced routine flu vaccine programmes for pregnant women. Millions of pregnant women have received the flu vaccine and its safety has been carefully monitored. Follow the link or scan the QR code to read the leaflet *Flu is more serious than you think* for pregnant women.

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/flu-more-serious-you-think-pregnant-women-english-and-10-translations



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The flu vaccine for children

If your child is aged 6 months or older and has a weakened immune system, they should have the flu vaccine. A child with a weakened immune system is more likely to become severely ill if they catch flu, and it could make their existing condition worse. Talk to your GP about your child having the flu vaccination before the flu season starts.

Flu vaccines do not work well in babies under 6 months old so it is not recommended. This is why it is so important that pregnant women have the vaccine – they will pass on some immunity to their baby that will protect them during the early months of their life.

Children aged 2 and 3 years will be given the vaccination at their general practice, usually by the practice nurse. School-aged children will mainly be offered a flu vaccine in school as a spray in each nostril. This is very quick and does not usually hurt.

For more information on children and flu vaccination, scan the QR code or follow the link to

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



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Is there anybody who should not get vaccinated?

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but you should not be vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to hens' eggs or have a condition that weakens your immune system, you may not be able to have certain types of flu vaccine – check with your GP. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.



Can the flu vaccine give me flu?

No. The vaccine cannot cause flu. Although a few people may feel slightly unwell after getting the flu vaccine this does not mean that they have got the flu.

Will I get any side effects?

Flu vaccinations are very safe. You may get some soreness in your arm where the vaccine was injected. Less often, people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a day or two after being vaccinated. Other reactions are very rare.

How does the vaccine work?

About a week to 10 days after you get the flu vaccine, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with.

Will the flu vaccine protect me completely?

Flu vaccinations only protect against flu. There are many other viruses around every winter that cause flu-like symptoms, including COVID-19. A small number of people may get flu even if they have been vaccinated, but it is likely to be a milder dose than if they had not been vaccinated.

When is the best time to be vaccinated for flu?

It is important that you get your flu vaccination in early autumn to be ready to fight off infection. You need to get a new dose of the vaccine each year, as protection doesn't last from one year to the next. The new vaccine, available in the autumn, protects against different strains of flu, so even if you were vaccinated in the spring, you still need the new vaccine.

How do I get the vaccine?

Most people will be invited to get their free flu vaccine by their GP but you can also get it from your local participating community pharmacy.

For more information about the flu vaccine, talk to your GP, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist, or visit: www.pha.site/flu



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