

Common questions about the children's flu vaccination

Why should children have the flu vaccine?

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can often last several days. Some children can also get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Complications of flu can include a painful ear infection, bronchitis, and pneumonia – these may be severe.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness and will also reduce the chance of others in your family getting it. It can help you avoid having to take time out because you are ill or to look after your sick child.

How will the vaccine be given?

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray.

Who will give my child their flu vaccination?

Specially trained healthcare staff will give your child the flu vaccination. In some cases, older children may be given the option to give the vaccine to themselves, under the supervision of the healthcare team.

How does the nasal vaccine work?

The nasal vaccine contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity, so that when your child comes into contact with the flu virus they are unlikely to get ill.

Are there any side effects of the vaccine?

Side effects are uncommon but may include a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

Are there any children who shouldn't have the nasal vaccine?

Children should not have the nasal vaccine if they:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past week (vaccination should be delayed until at least seven days after the wheezing has stopped)
- are severely asthmatic, i.e. being treated with oral steroids or high dose inhaled steroids
- are allergic to eggs or any part of the vaccine or
- have a condition that severely weakens their immune system.

Also, children who have been vaccinated should avoid close contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two weeks following vaccination. This is because there's an extremely remote chance that the vaccine virus may be passed to them.

I believe the nasal vaccine contains products derived from pigs (porcine gelatine), which means my child can't have it because of our beliefs.

The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (derived from pigs), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children.

This nasal vaccine not only helps protect your child against disease but, if enough children are vaccinated, the disease won't spread from one person to another, and so their friends and family are also protected.

Some faith groups accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to you. For further information about porcine gelatine and the nasal flu vaccine, see www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response

Can't my child have the injected vaccine that doesn't contain gelatine?

The nasal vaccine offers the best protection for your child and it reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other members of the family (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce the spread as effectively and so is not being offered to healthy children as part of this programme.

However, if your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine because of this, they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Has the vaccine been used in other countries?

Yes; it has been used safely in America for many years and it was used in the 2013/14 flu season in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.