

Flu vaccination programme FAQs

The flu vaccine can help you avoid catching flu. It lasts for one year, so you're protected for the whole season.

What is flu?

Flu is a highly contagious viral infection that most commonly occurs during the winter months. Outbreaks of the infection range from small local outbreaks to nationwide epidemics.

Flu is caused by a group of viruses. People can get flu many times as these viruses change, making it harder for the body's immune system to detect them.

How do people catch flu?

The flu virus is passed on from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. Droplets from the mouth and nose circulate in the atmosphere for other people to breathe in.

Flu can also be passed on through skin contact, eg shaking hands with someone who has flu or touching a surface they've recently touched. It's important to regularly wash your hands to prevent catching the virus as flu can live for a short period on the skin.

Why should I have a flu vaccination?

If you're in good health, it's unlikely that you'll suffer serious complications if you catch the virus. However, lots of other things can be affected like time off work and the added stress that goes with it. It's reassuring to know that protecting yourself also means you're protecting your children or elderly relatives who are more vulnerable.

Can anyone have the flu vaccination?

Yes. The vaccination is available to everyone but you shouldn't have it if:

- you have a severe allergy to egg or egg products
- you've had a severe allergic reaction to the flu vaccination in the past
- you think that you already have the flu

If you're pregnant, you can have the vaccination but you must let the nurse know about your pregnancy beforehand so they can go through the precautions with you fully.

Why should I have the flu vaccination?

There are many reasons why it's worth considering having the flu vaccine:

- the vaccine can offer some protection against other flu viruses that have similarities to the strains in the vaccine
- the vaccine contains several different viruses, so even if one of them doesn't closely match the flu strain, the vaccine can still protect you from other flu viruses that do
- the vaccine can help protect vulnerable people around you such as older people, pregnant women and children
- if you do get ill, having the vaccine may mean your illness is milder as you may already have some immunity
- if you get the flu it often means you'll need to be off work. Prevention is the best way to stop getting ill and means your life won't be interrupted by feeling poorly.

Can I have the flu vaccination at the same time as other vaccinations?

With most other immunisations, yes. Please let the nurse know before your injection what vaccination you had or are due to have. The nurse will advise and make a record of this on a case-by-case basis.

Is it safe to have flu and other vaccines at the same time?

Yes, having other vaccines at the same time is safe, and an individual gets the same level of protection regardless of whether they have the vaccines at the same time or on separate occasions. Whilst both vaccines can be given at the same time this may not always be possible.

Can the vaccination cause flu?

No. There isn't a live virus in the vaccine so it doesn't cause flu. You may experience a slight fever and aching muscles after your vaccination. If you do experience these symptoms, they should only last for a couple of days. Please ask if you would like more information.

Can I have the flu vaccination if I'm pregnant?

If you're pregnant, or think you might be, you can have the vaccination but you must let the nurse know beforehand and they'll go through the precautions fully with you.

Can I have the flu vaccination if I'm breast feeding?

Yes. There's no evidence to suggest the vaccine harms babies who breast feed.

Will I feel ill after having the flu vaccination?

You might worry that the vaccine may make you feel poorly after having it or even give you the flu. But it's important to know the vaccine won't give you the flu, although you may experience side effects.

A flu vaccine given via an injection contains an inactivated virus – this means the virus isn't live so it won't give you the flu.

You might have a bit of redness and soreness on your arm where you had the injection. You might also get a mild headache and muscle aches, but these are nothing to worry about and will ease within one or two days.

The process of making some flu vaccines involves the use of chicken eggs. If you're allergic to any form of eggs, please tell the doctor or nurse so they're able to offer the correct advice.

I'm on antibiotics for a chesty cough. I feel a lot better now but I'm still finishing the course, can I have the flu vaccination?

Yes. Please bear in mind, though, if you still have a temperature, or are coughing up infected phlegm, then it's recommended you wait until you are better.

What are the typical symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of flu appear about two days after the person has been infected and can include:

- a high temperature
- headache
- muscular aches and pains
- weakness
- fatigue

Flu symptoms generally last for about a week unless there are complications.

What if I choose not to have the flu vaccine?

If you choose not to have the vaccine, there is a chance that you may get flu. The vaccine doesn't offer guaranteed protection, but it can help reduce your risk.

There are over-the-counter medicines that can help to ease your symptoms, but prevention is usually the best plan.

Here are a few other ways to protect yourself from picking up or spreading a virus:

- wash your hands with hot soapy water after using the toilet and before preparing food
- cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze
- throw any tissues away as soon as you've used them

How can I deal with anxiety about having injections?

It's completely understandable that if you have anxiety around having a needle injection, then it's going to put you off having any vaccines or injections.

There are some things you can do to help yourself in this situation.

You might find it helpful to practise relaxation exercises, such as breathing control and meditation, to help you feel calm. Once you know some simple techniques, you can use them to help you de-stress if you're feeling anxious before an injection. These exercises take time, so it's a good idea to pick one that works for you and keep practising beforehand.

If you're anxious, talk to your nurse about it. Once they know how you're feeling, they'll do everything they can to make the experience as easy as possible for you.

Flu vaccination precautions.

There are a few things to think about before having a vaccination

Please take a look at these points and tell the nurse if any of the following apply to you:

- history of temperature, general colds/flu like symptoms within the last 24 hours
- history of immunosuppressive disorders, autoimmune illness or HIV
- any allergies to food or medication, specifically neomycin, gentamicin or formaldehyde
- any previous reaction to medication or a vaccination in the past
- you're taking any regular medication, specifically immunosuppressive or cytotoxic drugs
- you're pregnant or think that you might be
- you've received any live vaccinations within the last three weeks such as yellow fever, polio or rubella
- you've received the Novavax COVID 19 vaccine within the last 7 days

You're advised not to have the vaccine if:

- you're allergic to eggs
- you're allergic to products that contain chicken
- you've previously had a serious reaction to a flu vaccine
- you think that you already have the flu

Advice after your vaccination.

Now that you've had your flu vaccination, you've got a better chance of beating the flu virus this winter.

Possible side effects

The flu vaccination is considered very safe and can't cause flu, so you shouldn't experience any adverse side effects afterwards. If you do, here are some guidelines to follow.

- **Redness and/or tenderness around the injected area**

Apply ice wrapped in a tea towel or a cold flannel for 10 minutes to the injected area. You can also take paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief, if you're not allergic to them. Please follow the recommended dosage guidelines.

- **A general feeling of malaise/flu like symptoms such as aches and pains**

Don't worry, you can't catch flu from the vaccine. You might be feeling like this because you've contracted a cold before your injection or you're experiencing a mild reaction to the vaccine. You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief, if you're not allergic to them. Please follow the recommended dosage guidelines.

- **Significant swelling and/or redness**

If you've followed the advice mentioned, and are still suffering from significant swelling or redness, please seek medical advice, such as calling 111, seeing a GP or using health insurance.

- **Generalised rash**

Please seek medical advice. In very rare circumstances a temporary sensation of tingling, numbness or burning under the skin has been experienced as a side effect of the flu vaccine. Please read the vaccine leaflet for more information if you are concerned about any rare side effects.

Please inform your GP when you had the flu vaccine so that they have a full record of vaccinations you received. UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) ImmForm system also uses GP records to assess the total number of people who have been vaccinated against flu each year.

If you've got any clinical questions about your flu vaccination, don't think twice about calling our 24/7 Anytime HealthLine 0345 60 90 172

We may record or monitor our calls.