

Children's flu vaccine



In the autumn/winter of 2015/16 the annual nasal spray flu vaccine will be available for children aged two, three and four years old plus children in school years one and two as part of the [NHS childhood vaccination programme](#).

The vaccine will be offered routinely to all children aged two, three and four on August 31 2015. That is, children with a date of birth on or after September 1 2010 and on or before August 31 2013.

In addition, children in school years one and two will be offered flu vaccination.

In some parts of the country all primary school-aged children will also be offered the vaccine as part of a pilot programme.

For most children, flu vaccination will be offered via a school-based programme, although in some areas it may be through alternative schemes such as pharmacies and general practice.

Over time, as the programme rolls out, potentially all children between the ages of two and 16 will be offered vaccination against flu each year with the nasal spray.

The nasal spray flu vaccine

The flu vaccine for children is given as a single dose of nasal spray squirted up each nostril. Not only is it needle-free (a big advantage for children), the nasal spray works even better than the injected flu vaccine.

It's quick and painless and will mean your child is less likely to become ill if they come into contact with the flu virus.

The nasal spray has two different brand names Fluenz Tetra and Flumist Quadrivalent.

Read the [patient information leaflet \(PIL\) for the nasal spray flu vaccine](#).

The nasal spray flu vaccine is also for children aged two to 17 who are "at risk" from flu, such as children with long-term health conditions. Some of these children will be offered two doses of the vaccine.

The [injectable flu vaccine](#) will continue to be offered to those aged 65 and over, pregnant women, carers and adults and babies (aged six months to two years) with a long-term medical condition.

Read more about [which children are eligible for flu vaccination](#).

Why children are being offered a flu vaccine

Flu can be very unpleasant for children. They have the same symptoms as adults – including fever, chills, aching muscles, headache, stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat lasting up to a week.

Some children develop a very high fever or complications of flu such as [bronchitis](#), [pneumonia](#) and painful [middle ear infection](#). They may need hospital treatment, and very occasionally a child may die from flu.

For children with long-term health conditions such as [diabetes](#), [asthma](#), [heart disease](#) or lung disease, getting flu can be very serious as they are more at risk of developing serious complications.

Read more about [flu](#) and the [complications of flu](#).

Stopping the spread of flu

The nasal spray flu vaccine will not only help to protect your child from getting flu, it also stops the disease spreading from them to their family, carers and the wider population. This is known as herd immunity.

Watch a video explaining [herd immunity](#).

Children are good at spreading flu, because they tend to sneeze everywhere and don't use tissues properly or wash their hands. Vaccinating them may also protect others that are vulnerable to flu such as babies, older people, pregnant women and people with serious long-term illnesses.

Read more about [how flu is spread](#).

The flu vaccine for children is expected eventually to prevent at least 2,000 deaths from flu in the general population and lead to 11,000 fewer hospitalisations.

Children with long-term health conditions

Children with long-term health conditions are at extra risk from flu and it's especially important that they are vaccinated against flu each year.

Children at risk of flu are already offered an annual flu injection. As the nasal spray is more effective than the injected vaccine, children aged from two to 17 with long-term health conditions are now being offered the annual flu nasal spray instead of the injection.

Those children with long-term health conditions aged between six months and two years will continue to be offered the annual injectable flu vaccine.

Neither the nasal spray or the injectable flu vaccine are suitable for babies under the age of six months.

Are there children who shouldn't have the flu vaccine?

There are a few children who should avoid the nasal spray flu vaccine.

It's not suitable for children who have:

- a severely weakened immune system
- severe egg allergy
- severe asthma (children with mild or moderate asthma are able to have the flu nasal spray)
- active wheezing at the time of vaccination

Children unable to have the nasal spray vaccine may be able to have the flu injection instead.

Read more about [which children should not have the flu vaccination](#).

How does the flu vaccine for children work?

The nasal spray vaccine contains flu viruses that have been weakened to stop them causing flu. It will help your child build up immunity to flu in a similar way as natural infection (but without the symptoms).

Because the main flu viruses change each year, a new nasal spray vaccine has to be given each year, in the same way as the injectable flu vaccine.

The nasal spray works well in children and gives them good protection against catching flu. In fact, the nasal spray is more effective than the injected flu vaccine, especially in young children, which is why children are being routinely offered the nasal spray rather than the flu jab.

As the vaccine is absorbed very quickly, it will still work even if your child has a runny nose, sneezes or blows their nose straight after being vaccinated.

How many doses of the flu vaccine do children need?

Most children only need a single dose of the nasal spray.

The patient information leaflet provided with the nasal spray suggests children should be given two doses of this vaccine if they've not had flu vaccine before. However, the NHS vaccination programme has advised that healthy children need only a single dose because a second dose of the vaccine provides little additional protection.

Children aged two to nine years at risk of flu because of an underlying medical condition who have not received flu vaccine before should have two doses of the nasal spray (given at least four weeks apart).

How safe is the flu vaccine for children?

The flu vaccine for children has a very good safety profile. It's been widely used in the US for more than 10 years and no safety concerns have been raised so far.

The vaccine contains live, but weakened, forms of flu virus that do not cause flu in children who receive it.

What are the side effects of the flu vaccine for children?

The nasal spray flu vaccine has very few side effects, the main one being that vaccinated children may have a runny nose for a short time.

Read more about the [side effects of the flu vaccine for children](#).

This NHS leaflet tells you about [common vaccination reactions in babies and young children up to five years of age](#).

How to get the flu vaccine for your child

You'll be automatically contacted by your GP or your child's school in September/October 2015 about getting your child vaccinated before the winter. If you don't hear anything, or you want more information about when and how your child will be vaccinated against flu, talk to your GP, practice nurse or your child's school nurse.

Read the answers to some of the [common questions that parents have about the flu vaccine for children](#).

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