

**IF YOU KNEW ABOUT
FLU
YOU'D GET
THE JAB**

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For more information on
immunisation, visit www.nhs.uk/flu



Immunisation information

Flu jab 

Flu – what harm can it do?

For most people, flu is nasty but not serious: a short period of chills, aches and pains and then a return to normal health.

But some people are at greater risk from the effects of flu. For them, flu can increase the risk of more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia or can make existing conditions worse. In the worst cases, flu can result in a stay in hospital – or even death.

This leaflet explains who is more likely to be affected, and how a simple and free flu jab can reduce the risk.

If you are at greater risk, don't wait for winter or for a flu epidemic to ask for the jab. Arrange to see your GP or practice nurse in the autumn to get the best possible protection.

Are you at greater risk?

Even if you feel healthy, you should definitely consider having the flu jab if you have:

- a serious heart problem;
- a serious chest complaint, including asthma;
- diabetes;
- a serious kidney disease;
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment);
- a serious liver disease; or
- had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA).

Your GP may also advise you to have the jab if you have:

- multiple sclerosis (MS); or
- a condition that affects your nervous system (such as cerebral palsy).

You should also have the jab if you are aged 65 years or over.

Flu jab 

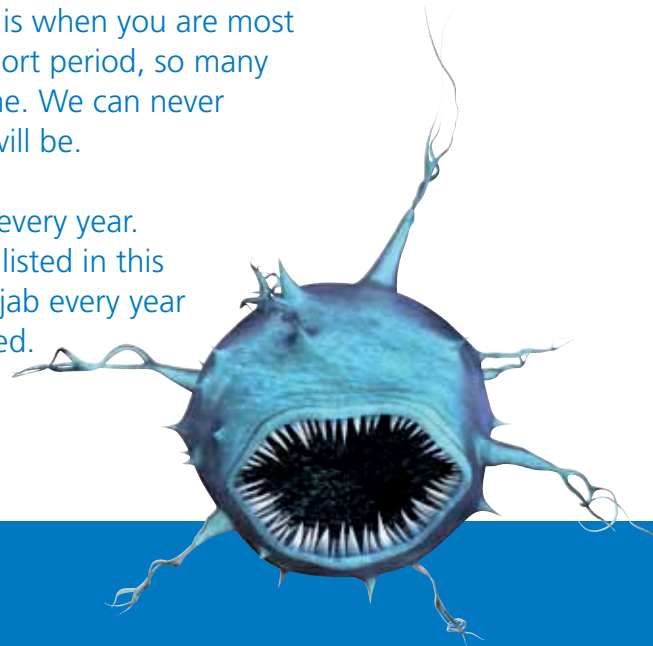
Why is flu risky?

Flu is not just a heavy cold. Colds are usually less serious, starting gradually with a sore throat and a stuffy or runny nose. Flu is sudden and much stronger. Symptoms include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, and you can get a cough and a sore throat at the same time.

Flu is highly infectious and spreads fast. You can catch the virus through the coughs and sneezes of infected people.

It reappears every winter, and this is when you are most at risk. It usually appears over a short period, so many people get ill around the same time. We can never predict how serious an outbreak will be.

The viruses that cause flu change every year. So if you are in one of the groups listed in this leaflet, you should have a free flu jab every year to make sure that you are protected.



A jab is your best protection

A jab helps your body to fight the flu virus

Your body starts making antibodies to the killed vaccine viruses about a week to ten days after the injection. These antibodies help to protect you for a whole year against similar flu viruses that you then come into contact with, but they cannot protect you against other winter viruses, which are often less serious.

Most people who have the jab will not get the flu

However, like any vaccine, the jab cannot give 100 per cent protection. It gives between 70 and 80 per cent protection against viruses that are a close match to those in the vaccine. But if you are unlucky enough to get the flu, it's likely to be a milder version than if you hadn't had the jab.

The vaccine is changed every year to stay ahead of the virus

Because the viruses change every year, the flu that is around this year will be different from last year's. Our vaccine needs to match the latest version of the virus so that we can protect you against it.

A jab is highly effective

We have been successful in recent years in closely matching the flu viruses in the vaccine with those that have subsequently been found in the UK.

The flu jab does not give you flu

The vaccine does not contain any live viruses, so it cannot give you flu. Side effects of the jab are minor compared with the risks associated with flu. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected. But that's all: any other side effects are rare.

You can still have the jab if you are pregnant

There are no reported problems in giving the vaccine to pregnant women.

Do not have the flu jab if you have an allergy to hens' eggs or if you have had a serious allergic reaction to the jab or one of its ingredients in the past. If in doubt, speak to your GP.

What to do next

If you belong to one of the groups mentioned in this leaflet (and you are not allergic to hens' eggs, the jab or one of its ingredients), speak to your GP or practice nurse about being vaccinated. Alternatively, you can speak to your local pharmacist.

It is best to have the jab in the autumn – before any outbreak of flu.

Don't wait for an epidemic or assume that you don't need another jab because you had one last year.

Flu jab 