

“Just” the flu?

Each year the flu kills on average 11,000 people and hospitalises thousands more. There’s no “just” about it.

The flu virus spreads from person to person. Even amongst those not showing symptoms.

The flu vaccine is the best protection for you and those around you and it’s available for free to those most at risk.

A flu vaccine is available for free on the NHS for the following:

- *Pregnant women*
- *Parents of children aged 2-11 years old*
- *Members of a shielding household*
- *65+ years old*
- *Frontline health and social care workers*
- *Those living with a long-term health condition, such as:*
 - *a heart problem*
 - *a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including bronchitis, emphysema or severe asthma*
 - *kidney disease*
 - *lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment)*
 - *liver disease*
 - *had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) .*
 - *diabetes*
 - *a neurological condition, e.g. multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy .*
 - *a learning disability*
 - *a problem with your spleen, e.g. sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed*
 - *are seriously overweight (BMI of 40 and above)*

The flu is not the same as getting a cold. It can seriously affect your health and the risks of developing complications are greater for people within the ‘at-risk’ groups. Healthy individuals usually recover within two to seven days, but for some the disease can lead to a stay in hospital, or even death. In this unprecedented year, it is vital that we do all we can to protect ourselves and others from the virus this winter.

[Find out more.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions –

Are you considering not getting the flu vaccine this year? Or is there something about it that concerns you? Read below for more information on why it’s good to get vaccinated, and how to find out more.

Is the flu vaccination safe? *The flu vaccination is safe and effective and must be given annually. It cannot give you the flu. It does not protect you from COVID-19 or seasonal coughs and colds, but it does give protection against the strains of flu virus*

that will be circulating this year. Adults usually receive the flu vaccination in injection form, and children usually receive a nasal spray.

When can I get the flu vaccination? We expect that the flu vaccination will be available from autumn 2020 onwards. You will be invited to book a vaccination appointment at around this time, but please contact your GP practice if not. It's important that you have your vaccination as soon as possible.

Where can I get the flu vaccination? Many people will receive their flu vaccination at a GP surgery as usual. Others may go to a pharmacy or another location in their community. School-aged children will receive their vaccination from a trained health professional at school or in their community. Health professionals will also vaccinate care home staff and residents on-site.

Is it safe to attend appointments at health clinics? The NHS is doing everything it can to make sure that vaccinations are given in safe environments. All possible precautions will be taken to make sure you, and staff, are protected. If you have COVID-19 symptoms, do not attend your vaccination appointment but instead self-isolate and book a coronavirus test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119. You can rebook your flu vaccination appointment at a later date.

How will I know if I have the flu or COVID-19? The flu virus and COVID-19 have symptoms which overlap, such as a high temperature or persistent cough. It may be difficult to tell which virus you have. For this reason, it's really important that you have a flu vaccination if you are eligible, and that you continue to follow the guidance on self-isolation and testing at nhs.uk/coronavirus if you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

Can you catch flu from the vaccine? No, the vaccine contains an inactivated virus which cannot give you flu.

Does the flu vaccine cause serious side effects? Only one in a million people get serious side effects. Mild side effects such as soreness around the injection site and aching muscles are more common, but these are far less serious than the effects of contracting flu.

Is flu just like having a bad cold? Flu is a very serious illness which kills 11,000 people a year and hospitalises many more. It can lead to severe complications including pneumonia and organ failure.

Does the nasal vaccine/spray contain gelatine? Yes, the nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the vaccine viruses stable so that the vaccine provides the best protection against flu. The nasal vaccine is offered to children, as it is more effective in the programme than the injected vaccine. This is because it is easier to administer and considered better at reducing the spread of flu to others, who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. 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, they should have the flu vaccine by injection. Some

people may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products. You should discuss your options with your nurse or doctor.

I've been vaccinated before so do I need to do it again? The flu virus mutates constantly, and the vaccine is updated every year to counter the latest strains so it is important to get vaccinated annually.

I'm healthy. Do I need to get vaccinated? Flu can cause serious illness or death in healthy people. Getting vaccinated reduces your chance of catching flu by 40-60%.

I'm pregnant. Should I get vaccinated? The flu vaccine is safe at any stage of pregnancy, and is recommended for all pregnant women as they face a higher risk of developing complications from flu.

Can I book online? This year eligible Londoners will be able to book their flu vaccine online with their local pharmacist at londonflu.co.uk. Londoners are also able to walk in to pharmacies and get the vaccine.