

2019-2020 Flu vaccine overview

16 July 2019- CDC

Flu vaccination is available every year on the NHS to help protect adults and children at risk of flu and its complications.

Flu can be unpleasant, but if you're otherwise healthy, it'll usually clear up on its own within a week.

But flu can be more severe in certain people, such as:

- anyone aged 65 and over
- pregnant women
- children and adults with an underlying health condition (such as long-term heart or respiratory disease)
- children and adults with weakened immune systems

Anyone in these risk groups is more likely to develop potentially serious [complications of flu](#), such as [pneumonia](#) (a lung infection), so it's recommended that they have a flu vaccine every year to help protect them.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is routinely given on the NHS to:

- adults 65 and over
- people with [certain medical conditions](#) (including children in at-risk groups from 6 months of age)
- [pregnant women](#)
- children aged 2 and 3 on 31 August 2019
- children in primary school
- frontline health or social care workers

Which type of flu vaccine should I have?

There are several types of flu vaccine.

You'll be offered the one that's most effective for your age:

- children aged 2 to 17 in an eligible group are offered a live attenuated quadrivalent vaccine (LAIV), given as a nasal spray
- adults aged 18 to 64 who are either pregnant, or at increased risk from flu because of a long-term health condition, are offered a quadrivalent injected vaccine – the vaccine

offered will have been grown either in eggs or cells (QIVe or QIVc), which are considered to be equally effective

- adults aged 65 and over will be offered either an adjuvanted trivalent injected vaccine grown in eggs (aTIV) or a cell-grown quadrivalent injected vaccine (QIVc) – both vaccines are considered to be equally effective.

If your child is aged between 6 months and 2 years old and is in a [high-risk group for flu](#), they'll be offered an injected flu vaccine as the nasal spray is not licensed for children under 2.

Talk to a GP, practice nurse or pharmacist for more information about these vaccines.

[Find out more about who should have the flu vaccine](#)

People aged 65 and over and the flu vaccine

You're eligible for the flu vaccine this year (2019-20) if you'll be aged 65 or over on 31 March 2020. That is, you were born on or before 31 March 1955.

So if you're currently 64 but will be 65 on 31 March 2020, you do qualify.

It's important that you benefit from having the most effective vaccine.

For those aged 65 or over, this is either the adjuvanted trivalent vaccine or the cell-grown quadrivalent vaccine.

Where to get the flu vaccine

You can have your NHS flu vaccine at:

- your GP surgery
- a local pharmacy offering the service
- your midwifery service if they offer it for pregnant women

Some community pharmacies now offer flu vaccination to adults (but not children) at risk of flu, including pregnant women, people aged 65 and over, people with long-term health conditions and carers.

If you have your flu vaccine at a pharmacy, you do not have to inform a GP. It's up to the pharmacist to do that.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus that can cause unpleasant illness in children and severe illness and death among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying medical health condition.

Studies have shown that the flu vaccine will help prevent you getting the flu.

It will not stop all flu viruses and the level of protection may vary, so it's not a 100% guarantee that you'll be flu-free.

But if you do get flu after vaccination, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been.

There's also evidence to suggest that [the flu vaccine can reduce your risk of having a stroke](#).

Over time, protection from the injected flu vaccine gradually decreases, and flu strains often change.

So new flu vaccines are produced each year, which is why people advised to have the flu vaccine need it every year, too.

[Find out more about how the flu vaccine works](#)

Flu vaccine side effects

Serious side effects of the injected flu vaccine are very rare.

You may have a mild fever and aching muscles for a couple of days after having the vaccine, and your arm may be a bit sore where you were injected.

Side effects of the nasal spray vaccine may commonly include a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness and some loss of appetite.

[Find out more about the side effects of the flu vaccine](#)

How safe is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccines used in the national programme have a good safety record.

Flu vaccines that have been licensed recently in England have been thoroughly tested before they're made available, and have been used in other countries with a good safety record.

When to have a flu vaccine

The best time to have a flu vaccine is in the autumn, from the beginning of October to the end of November.

But do not worry if you have missed it, as you can have the vaccine later in winter. Ask a GP or pharmacist.

The flu vaccine for 2019-20

Each year, the viruses that are most likely to cause flu are identified in advance and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) recommends which type of flu virus strains to include in the vaccine.

Is there anyone who should not have the flu vaccine?

Most adults can have the injected flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a [serious allergic reaction](#) to a flu vaccine in the past.

[Read more about who should not have the flu vaccine](#)

You can find out more by reading the answers to the most common questions that people have [about the flu vaccine](#).

Page last reviewed: 16 July 2019

Next review due: 16 July 2022