

Protecting your child against flu

Vaccination
for your primary
school child



Protecting your child against flu

The annual flu vaccination programme is being extended to include all children aged 2 to 16 years. The extended programme is being introduced in stages.

From the autumn of 2014 the following children will be offered the flu vaccine:

- All pre-school children who are aged two or over on 1 September 2014 (ie children born between 2 July 2010 and 1 September 2012). These children will be offered the vaccine at their GP's surgery.
- All primary school children. These children will be offered the vaccine at school by the school health service.

The programme will then be extended over the next couple of years to include all children aged 2 to 16 years.

This leaflet explains the benefits of flu vaccination for your primary school child.

Why is my child being offered the flu vaccine?

Vaccinating your child will help protect them against infection with the flu virus and also reduce further spread to other children and adults.

Fluenz®, which is the name of the flu vaccine that will be offered to children, is very effective and so the spread of flu should be reduced.

Why is the flu vaccine being introduced for children now ?

The new vaccine, Fluenz®, has become available in the UK and is more effective than existing flu vaccines in children aged 2 to 16 years. This vaccine has been used successfully and safely in America for many years. The vaccine is administered as a spray up the nose, making it easier to give.

What is flu like for children?

Children get the same unpleasant symptoms as adults – fever, chills, aching muscles and joints, headache and extreme tiredness. They can also have a stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. These symptoms can last between two and seven days. Some children have very high fever, sometimes without classical symptoms, and need to go to hospital for treatment. Complications arising from flu can include bronchitis, pneumonia and painful middle ear infection. In severe cases, which are very rare, flu can lead to disability and even death.

For children with some pre-existing medical conditions getting flu can be very serious as it is likely to make their condition much worse.

Why do we need to protect ourselves and our children against flu?

The flu virus spreads quickly and infects adults and children very easily, causing an unpleasant illness that may result in days spent in bed rather than at work, nursery, school or doing usual day-to-day activities.

How does flu spread?

The virus spreads through the air when people cough and sneeze without covering their nose and mouth. Other people then breathe in the virus directly or pick it up by touching surfaces on which it has landed. Because young children don't always cover their noses or mouths when coughing or sneezing they can spread the virus very quickly.

How will the vaccine be given?

Unlike most vaccines, Fluenz® is not injected. It is given as a spray up each nostril. The child can breathe normally while the vaccine is being administered. There is no need to actively inhale or sniff.

For medical reasons a very small number of children will not be able to receive Fluenz®. They will be given a different flu vaccine by injection instead.

Why are only some children being offered Fluenz® this year?

The extended flu vaccination programme is being phased in over a few years so that arrangements can be established for full implementation.

This year all primary school children will be offered Fluenz®.

Where will my child get Fluenz®?

Primary school children will be offered Fluenz® in school.



If your child does not get the vaccine in school, for example if they are not at school on the day it is offered, then you can contact your GP surgery to get it. This is especially important if your child is in one of the at risk groups.

I've heard that Fluenz® is live. Does this mean my child will get the flu?

No. Fluenz® contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent it causing flu but help your child build up immunity in the same way as a natural infection (but without the nasty symptoms). For this reason, the live Fluenz® vaccine is more effective than the injected vaccines, particularly in young children.

Individuals with weakened immune systems, however, may not be able to handle the weakened live viruses in Fluenz®. Therefore if your child has a weakened immune system it is important to indicate this on the consent form. These children need to be vaccinated, but it should be with the injected vaccine.

Will there be any side effects of Fluenz®?

We know from America where Fluenz® has been used for several years that it is a very safe vaccine. A runny or stuffed nose is the most common side effect following the nasal spray.

Fluenz® is absorbed very quickly, so even if your child gets a runny nose or sneezes immediately after the spray, there's no need to worry, because it will still have worked. Full details of the side effects are provided in the Fluenz® patient information leaflet.

Are there any children who shouldn't have Fluenz®?

Children whose immune systems are severely weakened due to certain conditions or medical treatments should not have Fluenz®.

Also, your child should not have Fluenz® if he or she has had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or any of the substances included in it. Please list all your child's allergies on the consent form so the nurse can check if he or she can have the vaccine. If your child is taking salicylates including acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) they should not receive Fluenz®. Fluenz® is not recommended for children with active wheezing at the time of vaccination or who have very severe asthma.

Most of the children with these conditions can still be given the injected vaccine, so you should make sure you include the details of the condition or treatment on the consent form so the appropriate vaccine can be offered.

Also, people with very severely weakened immune systems, eg those needing treatment in isolation

units, should avoid close contact with vaccinated children for two weeks because there is a very remote chance the vaccine virus may be passed to them.

My child is allergic to egg. What should I do?

If your child has had a serious allergic reaction to egg, he or she will be offered an alternative flu vaccine that will be injected in the arm in the normal way. If your child has previously had a reaction but is now non-allergic he or she can get the Fluenz® vaccine. Make sure you put any allergy details on the consent form so the nurse can decide which is the best vaccine.

Will my child be protected for life when they've had Fluenz®?

No. The flu virus can change every year and a new vaccine has to be made to match it. So next year's vaccine may contain different viruses from this year's vaccine. Your child will need to be vaccinated again next year and every year, until he or she is 16 years old, to get the best protection against flu.

Summary of reasons why your child should have the Fluenz® vaccination

It offers protection against those strains of flu virus that are most likely to be circulating each winter – protecting your child against a nasty disease that could require treatment in hospital.

It reduces the spread of flu and helps protect those most at risk of its complications.

It reduces the risk of parents and carers having to take time out of work to look after ill children.

Fluenz® has been used successfully and safely for several years in America. It's quick and painless.

Translations in a range of regional and minority ethnic languages are available.

For further details visit www.publichealth.hscni.net or www.fluawareni.info



Public Health Agency, 12–22 Linenhall Street,
Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

www.publichealth.hscni.net