

2023 edition

# Flu vaccine

Important information for adults



# What is flu?

Influenza (flu) is an infectious virus and can be serious. The flu virus spreads through the air when people cough or sneeze, or by touching surfaces where it has landed then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

## Flu symptoms

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a sudden fever (temperature of 38°C or above)
- chills
- headache
- muscle aches and pains
- feeling extremely tired
- dry cough, sore throat and stuffy nose

For more information, visit [www.nhsinform.scot/influenza](http://www.nhsinform.scot/influenza)

# How does the flu vaccine work?

Flu vaccines help protect against the main types of flu viruses. There's still a small chance you might get flu this winter, even if you have been vaccinated, but it's likely to be milder and not last as long.

The flu vaccine does not contain any live flu viruses and cannot give you flu.

The flu vaccine works by teaching your body's immune system how to protect itself from the disease.

You have to get vaccinated every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. A different vaccine is made every year to ensure the best protection against flu.

# The benefits of the flu vaccine

1. This year's flu vaccine gives you the best possible protection against the flu viruses likely to be circulating this season.
2. The vaccine protects people around you who are more at risk of serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people and people with health conditions.
3. Being vaccinated will reduce your risk of being hospitalised with serious flu illness.



Even healthy people can become seriously ill from flu. It can lead to complications that may result in hospitalisation or even death.



# Who will be offered the flu vaccine?

NHS Scotland recommends you have the flu vaccine if you:

- are aged 50 years and over
- are aged 18–64 with an eligible health condition
- work in social care and deliver direct personal care
- are a frontline healthcare worker
- are a carer (including unpaid carer)
- are an independent contractor or support staff (GP, dental, optometry and community pharmacy practices)
- are a teacher or support staff (pupil facing)
- are a prison officer or support staff member who delivers direct detention services.

## Eligible health conditions

People with certain health conditions are more at risk of flu-related complications and need extra protection, even if their health condition is mild or well-managed.

Conditions which can make flu more serious include:

- asthma\*
- bronchitis
- emphysema
- cystic fibrosis
- chronic heart disease
- chronic kidney failure
- multiple sclerosis
- liver problems
- diabetes
- asplenia (dysfunction of the spleen)
- being very overweight
- HIV infection
- stroke
- undergoing chemotherapy treatment
- taking medication that reduces immunity.

\* requiring continuous/repeated steroid treatment or previous hospital admission

# The flu vaccine

## How is the vaccine given?

The flu vaccine will be given as an injection in the upper arm.

You only need one dose of the flu vaccine each flu season. It takes around 10 days for the vaccine to work, so the sooner you get it the better.

## How safe is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine, and gives the best protection against flu. It's offered to those who are eligible every year for free by NHS Scotland to help protect people at risk of flu and its complications.



# What are the side effects?

The flu vaccine is safe and effective but, like all medicines, can cause side effects.

It's normal to experience side effects after the vaccine. It shows the vaccine is teaching your body's immune system how to protect itself from the disease, however, not everyone gets them.

Side effects are usually mild and may include:



**tenderness,  
swelling and/or  
redness at the  
injection site**



**muscle aches**



**headache**



**fever (temperature  
of 38°C or above)**

You may also feel generally unwell. These common side effects are much less serious than developing flu or complications associated with flu, and they usually go away within a few days.



**For more information on vaccine ingredients,  
and links to the manufacturer's information  
leaflets, visit [www.nhsinform.scot/flu](http://www.nhsinform.scot/flu)  
or call 0800 030 8013.**

## What should I do if I'm concerned about my side effects?

Side effects normally last less than a week. You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help you feel better.

If your side effects seem to get worse or if you're concerned, call **NHS24** free on **111**.

If you seek advice from a health professional, tell them about your vaccination so that they can assess you properly.

## Reporting side effects

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme at **[www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard)**, by using the Yellow Card app, or by calling **0800 731 6789**.

## Are there any reasons you should not get the vaccine?

Most adults can have the flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you've had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a flu vaccine in the past, or if you are allergic to any of the vaccine ingredients.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs. It's important that you tell the person giving you your vaccine if you have an egg allergy or if you've ever had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine.



For more information about the flu vaccine visit **[www.nhsinform.scot/flu](http://www.nhsinform.scot/flu)** or call **0800 030 8013**.



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