

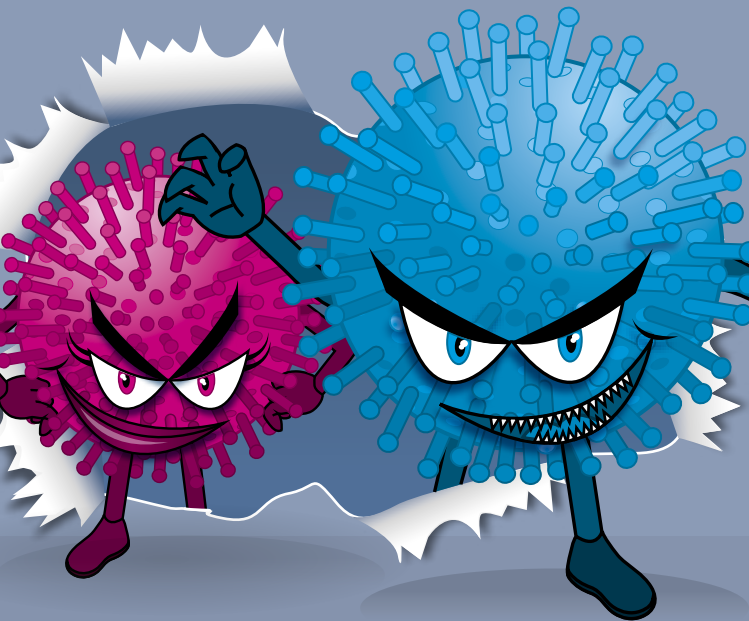


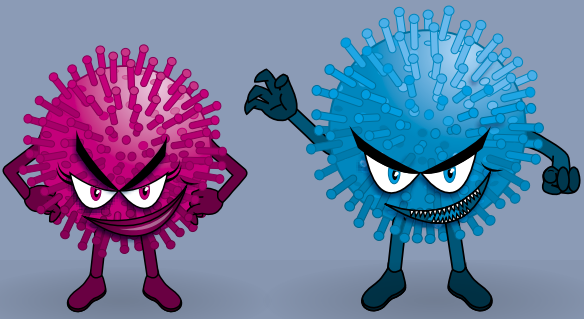
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# FLU

**FLU IS A KILLER**

**A guide to flu vaccination**





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## About flu

Flu is caused by viruses which can change each year. So new vaccines are produced to try and match them. This gives people the best protection.

## Why is flu serious?

Flu spreads easily and can cause serious illnesses which need to be treated in hospital. It occurs every year, usually in winter. Flu causes many deaths. It is not the same as a bad cold.

## How will I know if I have flu?

When people get flu they tend to become ill quite quickly. Symptoms include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, often with a cough and sore throat.

## What should I do if I get flu?

Using a tissue when you sneeze or cough and washing your hands helps to stop flu spreading.

Antibiotics won't help. There are medicines called antivirals that can be given to those most at risk from flu. These may help if taken within 2 days of the start of the illness. If you are at increased risk of flu and its complications, and think you may have it, you should talk to your doctor urgently.

If you are in a risk group and haven't had the vaccine this flu season, you should have it as soon as you are feeling better. This will protect you against other types of flu.

## **What harm can flu do?**

Often people who get flu need to stay in bed for a few days, but flu can lead to serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia that may need hospital treatment. Flu is more serious if you have certain illnesses or are older. In a normal winter, thousands of people will die from flu related illnesses in the UK.

## **Am I at greater risk from the effects of flu?**

Even if you feel healthy, you are at increased risk from flu if you have one of the following conditions. You should have a flu vaccination if you have:

- A heart problem.
- A chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including asthma that requires regular steroid inhalers or tablets.
- 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 (mini-stroke).
- Diabetes.
- A neurological condition, for example multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy or post-polio syndrome.
- A problem with your spleen, for example sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed.

**You should also have the flu vaccination if you are:**

- Pregnant.
- Aged 65 years or over.
- Living in a residential or nursing home.

## **Carers**

If you care for someone whose health would be at risk if you became ill with flu, you should have a free flu vaccine. This will help protect you and the person you care for.

You should also have the flu vaccine if you are a member of an organisation providing planned first aid or are a community first responder.

## Health and social care workers

If you are a health or social care worker in direct contact with patients or clients, you should have a flu vaccination to protect yourself and the people you care for. Your employer is responsible for paying for your vaccination.

## Pregnant women

If you are pregnant you should have the flu vaccine to protect yourself and your unborn child. If a pregnant woman gets flu, her baby is more likely to be born early or with a low birth weight, be stillborn or die within their first week. The vaccine also protects the baby in the first 4-6 months of life when flu can be very serious.

## Children

Children from 6 months of age with any of the conditions listed above or who have previously been admitted to hospital with a chest infection, should have a flu vaccination.

Over the next few years, a nasal spray vaccine is being introduced for children from 2 to 16 years of age. It is more effective than the flu injection in children. This will help prevent children from catching flu and also prevent them from spreading it to others. There is a separate leaflet which provides the most recent information.

## **I had a flu vaccine last year. Do I need one this year?**

Yes, if you are in a risk group for flu you need to have a flu vaccine every year.

## **Is there anyone who should not have the flu vaccine?**

There are very few people who cannot have a flu vaccine. People who have previously had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine (or any part of it) should not have that flu vaccine again.

Tell the nurse or doctor if you have a serious egg allergy. You can still be vaccinated but they need to know because some flu vaccines are not suitable.

The nasal spray vaccine should not be given to anyone who has a weakened immune system, severe asthma, a wheezy chest when the vaccine is due, or is allergic to eggs.

People who are unwell with a high temperature should delay vaccination until they are feeling better.

A runny nose, cough or other minor illness are not reasons to delay the vaccine.

## **Will I get any side effects?**

The flu vaccine is very safe. After having the vaccine, some people get a slight temperature, feel tired, have a headache, or aching muscles for a day or two.

After the injection, your arm may be a bit red and sore but other reactions are less common.

The nasal spray may cause a runny or blocked nose.

Other side effects are very rare.

Flu vaccines are quick and safe and could prevent weeks of serious illness.

## **Will the flu vaccine give me flu?**

No, the flu vaccine will not give you flu.

## **Will the flu vaccine protect me completely?**

The vaccine offers good protection against flu in the flu season it is given. Protection starts around two weeks after the vaccination.

You may still get flu even after vaccination but often with milder symptoms.

Flu vaccines do not protect against colds and other winter illnesses.

## **What do I need to do next?**

If you are in any of the groups recommended to have a flu vaccine, it is important that you have it. You can be vaccinated free of charge at your GP practice or at some pharmacies. If your child is in the age range for vaccination, you should be contacted by your GP or school nursing service. You can get advice from your GP practice, local pharmacy or NHS Direct Wales.

Flu vaccines are normally available from the end of September. For the best protection, have the flu vaccine in the early autumn before there are any outbreaks of flu. It can be given later in the year but early autumn is best.

## Where can I get more information?



Visit:

[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)  
or phone NHS Direct Wales on  
0845 46 47

You can also speak to your doctor or nurse.

Copies of this leaflet are available by e-mailing [hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk) or telephoning:  
0845 606 4050



This leaflet is available on the Welsh Government immunisation website at:  
[www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation/](http://www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation/)

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