

**SWINE FLU  
INFORMATION**

[www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)

0800 1 513 513

# SWINE FLU VACCINATION: what you need to know



**Flu. Protect yourself and others.**

# Contents

What is swine flu? . . . . .3

About the swine flu vaccine . . . . .4

What else do I need to know? . . . . .8

What should I do now? . . . . .10

## What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease caused by a new strain of influenza virus. The seasonal flu vaccines that are already available don't protect against swine flu, so a new flu vaccine has been developed.

## How serious is swine flu?

For most people, swine flu is mild. It comes on quickly and generally lasts for around a week. It causes fever, tiredness, cough and sore throat. Other symptoms can include a headache, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, a runny nose, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Some people are more likely to be seriously ill with swine flu. These can include people who have long-term health conditions, who are pregnant or whose immune system is affected by a disease or treatment for a disease. They may need to go to hospital and, in the very worst cases, some may die.

This is why it is important to have a vaccine to prevent people from catching swine flu.

## About the swine flu vaccine

Vaccines have been developed to protect against the virus that causes swine flu. There are two different brands of vaccine – Pandemrix and Celvapan. Many people given the Pandemrix vaccine will only need one dose. People who have the Celvapan vaccine will need two doses three weeks apart.

### Is it the same as the seasonal flu vaccination?

No. The swine flu vaccine is different from the seasonal flu vaccination that's offered every year. The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu. If you are usually advised to have the seasonal flu vaccination, you should have it. You may be offered the swine flu vaccine as well.

**The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu.**

## Who will get the vaccination first?

The vaccine is being offered first to people who are most likely to become seriously ill if they catch swine flu.

These people are in the following priority groups:

### 1. Adults and children over six months of age who have a long-term health condition, including:

- Chronic lung disease
- Chronic heart disease
- Chronic kidney disease
- Chronic liver disease
- Chronic neurological diseases
- Diabetes mellitus
- Immunosuppression caused by a disease or treatment for a disease. For example, this may include people who do not have a spleen, and people who are on immunosuppressant treatment or are taking high doses of systemic steroids.

### 2. Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy

Being pregnant can put you more at risk of being seriously ill if you catch swine flu. So far, evidence suggests that pregnant women are four

times more likely to develop serious complications from swine flu and up to five times more likely to need to go to hospital. The risks of flu are highest at the later stages of pregnancy.

### **3. People who live in the same house as someone whose immune system is compromised by disease or treatment**

If you live with someone who is having treatment for cancer, for example, and you catch swine flu, they might catch it from you and become very ill.

If you have a severely compromised immune system, ask the people you live with to think about getting vaccinated to help protect you against catching swine flu. If you are unsure about whether you should be vaccinated, speak to your GP or practice nurse.

**The vaccine is also being offered to health and social care staff who may be in close contact with people in the above groups.**

## **Who can't have the swine flu vaccine?**

There are only a few people who cannot have the swine flu vaccine. The vaccines should not be given to anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or any component of the vaccine. If you are worried that this may apply to you, talk to your GP or practice nurse.

## **What about people with egg allergies?**

The Pandemrix vaccine is prepared in hens' eggs in the same way that seasonal flu vaccines are. It should not be given to people who have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (experiencing shock or difficulty breathing) after being exposed to egg products. The Celvapan vaccine is not prepared using eggs, so you should have this vaccine if you have a severe allergy to eggs.

## **What about everyone else?**

People who aren't in the priority groups listed may be offered the vaccine at a later stage. The Government has ordered enough vaccine for everyone in the country if the situation requires it.

## **What else do I need to know?**

### **Are there any side-effects?**

All vaccinations can produce side-effects such as redness, soreness and swelling at the site of the injection. Flu vaccines can cause symptoms like fever, headache and muscle aches, but they are much milder than the flu itself and only last a day or so.

If you think that you or someone you know has experienced a more serious side-effect to Pandemrix or Celvapan, please report it to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency at [www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu).

**The vaccine is not live and cannot cause swine flu.**

### **But how can we be sure these new vaccines are safe and effective?**

Pandemrix and Celvapan are both licensed vaccines. Similar vaccines containing another flu virus strain (H5N1) have been clinically tested in trials involving over 5,000 people, including older people. When they licensed the vaccines, the European Commission carefully considered all the evidence and recommended that they could be used.

The trials show that people tolerate the vaccines well and produce enough antibodies to provide protection.

Experience with seasonal flu vaccines has shown that changing the strain of virus in a vaccine does not substantially affect the safety profile of the vaccines.

### **Is the vaccine safe for pregnant women?**

The European Medicines Agency has said Pandemrix and Celvapan can be given to pregnant women. Pregnant women are recommended to have the swine flu vaccine because they are at greater risk of being seriously ill with swine flu. They also have a higher risk of needing to go to hospital if they catch swine flu. These risks increase during the later stages of pregnancy.

If you are about to give birth, having the swine flu vaccine could help you avoid catching swine flu and then passing it to your baby.

### **Do I still need the swine flu vaccine if I've already had swine flu?**

Only the very early cases of swine flu were confirmed by a laboratory test, so most people cannot be certain they have had swine flu. People in the priority groups should still have the vaccine unless they had a positive test for swine flu.

## What should I do now?

If you are in one of the priority groups for the swine flu vaccination described on pages 5 and 6, you will be invited to go to an immunisation clinic or to make an appointment at your surgery.

Not everyone in the country will get their vaccine at exactly the same time, so don't worry if you don't hear from your GP surgery straightaway.

However, if after a few weeks you think you should have received a vaccine and you have not, get in touch with your GP surgery.

Depending on your age and medical condition, and which vaccine you are given, you may require two doses. Your GP will tell you whether you need to make a follow-up appointment for a second dose.

## If you think you have swine flu

### In England

Visit [www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)

Call the National Pandemic Flu Service:

**0800 1 513 100**

Textphone: **0800 1 513 200**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

## **In Scotland**

Contact your GP or NHS24: **08454 24 24 24**

Textphone: **18001 08454 24 24 24**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

## **In Wales**

Contact your GP or call NHS Direct Wales:

**0845 46 47**

Textphone: **0845 606 46 47**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

## **In Northern Ireland**

Call your GP or the Northern Ireland swine flu helpline: **0800 0514 142**

Textphone: **18001 0800 0514 142**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

Calling NHS24 should cost no more than the price of a local telephone call from a BT landline. Calls to NHS Direct Wales cost a minimum of 2p per minute from most BT landlines. Calls to all other numbers above are free from landlines. Calls from mobiles and other networks may vary – please check with your provider.

## **If you want more information**

For general information about swine flu:

**[www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)**

**0800 1 513 513**

## Why is getting vaccinated a good idea?

Getting vaccinated against swine flu will:

- help protect you against swine flu
- help protect your family and other people who are close to you – as it is less likely that they will catch the virus from you
- help protect you against future waves of infection caused by the swine flu virus.

You can order copies of this leaflet in Braille, large print, Easy Read, audio and Sign Language formats.

In addition, you can download copies of this leaflet in alternative formats and other languages at [www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)