

Flu protection advice
for **health** and
social care
workers



Catch the vaccine
not the flu



Health
Promotion
Agency

Why immunise health and social care workers?

Immunising health and social care workers aims to reduce the spread of influenza (flu) in health and social care premises.

This helps to:

- protect patients and service users, including vulnerable patients who may not respond well to their own immunisation;
- protect other health and social care staff;
- make sure health and social care services are effective and efficient.

Who should have the flu vaccine?

All health and social care staff who are directly involved in caring for patients in:

- general practice;
- hospitals;
- residential care homes.

This includes:

- medical staff;
- ambulance drivers;
- care staff.

Generally the vaccine is not advised for staff who are not directly involved in patient care. However, in some cases, an employer may offer the vaccine to these staff.

What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious illness caused by influenza viruses. It is most common during the winter months. People often describe a bad cold as flu, but really having flu is much worse. The symptoms of flu come on suddenly and are different from and much more severe than colds.

These symptoms include:

- a high fever;
- a shivery feeling;
- a headache;
- an aching body;
- extreme tiredness.

Most people recover completely from flu within a week or two, but for some people it can be more serious.

Who is most at risk from flu?

Anyone can get flu but it is more serious for older people and people with a chronic medical condition, particularly heart or chest disease. Flu can lead to more serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and may be life-threatening for people who are already ill.

How does the flu vaccine work?

About a week to ten days after you get the vaccine, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine virus. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with. The protection lasts for about a year.

Can the vaccine cause flu?

No. The viruses in the vaccine are inactivated (killed) and cannot cause flu. Some people may experience mild flu-like symptoms for up to 48 hours as their immune system responds to the vaccine but this is not flu.

How effective is the vaccine?

The current flu vaccines give 70% to 80% protection against infection with influenza viruses closely matching those in the vaccine.

Should I expect a reaction to the immunisation?

After immunisation your arm may be a bit sore for a day or two where you had the injection. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days. Other reactions are very rare.

Is there anybody who can't have the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine should not be given to those who have had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

Flu vaccines are prepared in hens' eggs so they should not be given to anyone with a known serious anaphylactic reaction to egg products.

If a person is ill with a fever, the immunisation should be delayed until they have recovered.

When should I have the flu vaccine?

The best time to have the vaccine is in October or November before the main flu season. Because the viruses that cause flu change each year, the vaccine has to change too, so you need to have the flu vaccine every year.

Where do I get the vaccine from?

You should contact your occupational health department for more information. If you work in primary healthcare or social care, you should contact your employer. No matter where you are working, if you are already in an 'at-risk' group because of your own health status, your GP should contact you to offer you the vaccine.



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