

Does the vaccine have side effects?

Flu vaccinations are very safe. You may get some soreness where the vaccine was injected. Less often, people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days after being vaccinated. Other reactions are very rare.

How does the vaccine work?

About a week to 10 days after you get the seasonal flu vaccine, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with. The protection lasts for about a year.

The swine flu vaccine works in a similar way. Because it is a new virus and your body will never have come into contact with it before, you will need two injections to provide full protection.

How effective is it?

Flu vaccinations are highly effective. Seasonal flu vaccinations only protect against seasonal flu. There are many other viruses around every winter which cause flu-like symptoms, but these are usually not as serious as flu.

A small number of people may get seasonal flu even after vaccination, but it is likely to be a milder dose than if they had not been vaccinated.

The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu.

When is the best time to be vaccinated for seasonal flu?

It is important that you get your seasonal flu vaccination in October or early November to be ready to fight off infection. The earlier you get the vaccine, the sooner you will develop protection. You need to get a new dose of the vaccine every year.

How do I get the vaccine?

Simply contact your GP surgery and the receptionist will be able to tell you the arrangements for seasonal flu vaccination in your practice.

You will be invited to attend for swine flu vaccination when it is due.

For more information about the flu vaccines:

Talk to your GP, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist, or visit:
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk
www.nidirect.gov.uk
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Alternative formats and translations in a range of regional and minority ethnic languages are available. For further details, contact the Public Health Agency or visit the websites listed above.



Public Health Agency
Ormeau Avenue Unit, 18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast, BT2 8HS.
Tel: 028 9031 1611 (voice/minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

protect yourself catch the vaccine not the flu



Seasonal flu vaccination

You may have heard a lot recently about different types of flu, particularly swine flu and seasonal flu. This leaflet explains the difference between swine flu and seasonal flu, and highlights why it is still important to get the seasonal flu vaccine.

What is seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu occurs every year, usually in the winter. It is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, aching muscles, cough and sore throat - and because seasonal flu is a virus, antibiotics won't help.

People sometimes call a bad cold the flu, but really, having flu is much worse.

How is swine flu different from seasonal flu?

Swine flu is a completely new virus against which very few people are likely to have immunity. It can occur at any time of the year, may affect more people than seasonal flu, and can be more serious. A vaccine to protect against swine flu will be available later in the winter and the people likely to need it most will be offered it first.



What harm can seasonal flu do?

At best it is a nasty experience, even for people who are usually fit and healthy. However, it can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, or can make existing conditions worse.

In the worst cases, seasonal flu can result in a stay in hospital or even death.

Who should get the seasonal flu vaccine?

The following are at greater risk from the effects of seasonal flu and should get the vaccine:

- Anyone aged 65 or over, even if they feel fit and healthy at the moment.
- Children and adults who have any of the following serious medical conditions:
 - a chronic chest condition such as asthma;
 - a chronic heart condition;
 - chronic liver disease;
 - chronic kidney disease;
 - diabetes;
 - lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroids or cancer therapy;
 - a chronic neurological condition such as, stroke, transient ischaemic attack (TIA), multiple sclerosis or hereditary and degenerative diseases of the central nervous system;

- any other serious medical condition - check with your doctor if you are unsure.

Pregnant women with any of the above conditions should get the vaccine regardless of the stage of pregnancy.

- Children who have previously been admitted to hospital with a chest infection.
- Anyone living in a residential or nursing home.

If you are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person then you should ensure that they are vaccinated (if recommended). You should also seek advice from your GP surgery as to whether you should be vaccinated so that you can continue to look after that person.

Is there anyone who should not be vaccinated?

You should not be vaccinated if you have a serious allergy to hens' eggs. If in doubt, ask your doctor.

Can the seasonal flu vaccine give you flu?

No, the vaccine does not contain a live virus, so it cannot cause flu.