

Common Questions about flu and immunisations.

Why are children being offered a flu vaccine?

Flu can be very unpleasant for children. They have the same symptoms as adults – including fever, chills, aching muscles, headache, stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat lasting up to a week. Some children develop a very high fever or complications of flu such as bronchitis, pneumonia and painful middle ear infection. They may need hospital treatment, and very occasionally a child may die from flu. For children with long-term health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease or lung disease, getting flu can be very serious as they are more at risk of developing serious complications.

What role do children play in spreading flu?

Children, particularly those of school age, contribute considerably to the spread of flu to their nursery and school friends, families and communities by shedding greater quantities of the virus for longer periods than adults.

Which children can have the flu vaccination?

This year's nasal spray flu vaccine will be offered routinely on the NHS to all children who were aged two and three on September 1st 2013 and children aged 4-11 years who are educated in the London Borough of Havering.

Why are only children in Havering being offered the Flu vaccination?

Havering and six other areas have been chosen as pilot sites in preparation for next year when all children will be offered the vaccination in order to learn from the implementation process and how to then extend the programme efficiently across the country next winter. The children offered the vaccine this year will be protected against Flu for this winter.

Are there children who shouldn't have the flu vaccine?

There are a few children who should avoid the nasal spray flu vaccine. It's not suitable for children who have:

- a weakened immune system
- egg allergy
- severe asthma
- active wheezing at the time of vaccination
- are taking salicylate (aspirin) treatment (a painkiller used in conditions such as childhood rheumatoid arthritis)
- are allergic to any of the vaccine ingredients, such as neomycin and gentamicin.

Children unable to have the nasal spray vaccine may be able to have the flu injection instead.

How does the flu vaccine for children work?

The nasal spray vaccine contains flu viruses that have been weakened to stop them causing flu. It will help your child build up immunity to flu in a similar way as natural infection (but without the symptoms). Because the main flu viruses change each year, a new nasal spray vaccine has to be given each year, in the same way as the injectable flu vaccine.

Fluenz works well in children and gives them good protection against catching flu. In fact, the nasal spray is more effective than the injected flu vaccine, especially in young children, which is why children are being routinely offered the nasal spray rather than the flu jab. As the vaccine is absorbed very quickly, it will still work even if your child has a runny nose, sneezes or blows their nose straight after being vaccinated.

Does my child have to have the nasal spray flu vaccine?

No, they don't. As with all immunisations, flu vaccinations for children are optional but strongly recommended. Remember, this vaccine will protect them from what can be an unpleasant illness as well as stopping them spreading flu to vulnerable relatives and friends.

How safe is the flu vaccine for children?

Fluenz has a very good safety profile. It's been widely used in the US for more than 10 years and no safety concerns have been raised so far.

The vaccine contains live, but weakened, forms of flu virus that do not cause flu in children who receive it.

Why aren't children being given the injected flu vaccine instead of a nasal spray?

The nasal spray flu vaccine is more effective than the injected flu vaccine in healthy children so it's the preferred option.

How many doses will my child need?

Most children will only require one dose. For children who are at greater risk such as those with heart conditions, diabetics, or asthmatics, they may require a second dose one month later.

Which children should delay having the nasal spray flu vaccine?

If a child has a heavily blocked or runny nose at the time of vaccination, it might stop the vaccine getting into their system, so it's best to postpone the flu vaccination until their nasal symptoms have cleared up.

What are the side effects of the flu vaccine for children?

The nasal spray flu vaccine has very few side effects, the main one being that vaccinated children may have a runny nose for a short time. Other possible side effects include:

- high temperature
- headache
- feeling slightly unwell
- loss of appetite

As with all vaccines, there's a very small chance of a severe allergic reaction (known medically as anaphylaxis). The overall rate of anaphylaxis after vaccination is around one in 900,000 (so slightly more common than one in a million).

Anaphylaxis is very serious but it can be treated with adrenaline. When it happens, it's within a few minutes of the vaccination. Staff who give vaccinations have all been trained to spot and deal with anaphylactic reactions and children recover completely with treatment.

What to do if your child has a side effect from the flu nasal spray vaccine

If your child has a runny nose after their flu vaccination, simply wipe their nose with a tissue and then discard it. Remember, catch it, bin it, kill it.

If your child develops a fever after their flu vaccination, keep them cool by:

- making sure they don't have too many layers of clothes or blankets on
- giving them cool drinks

You could also give them infant paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce their fever.

If you're worried about your child, trust your instincts and speak to your doctor or call NHS 111.

Call the doctor immediately if, at any time, your child has a temperature of 39 degrees C or above, or has a fit.

Will the flu vaccine give my child flu?

No, it will not. The vaccine contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them causing flu. After having the nasal spray your child will build up resistance to flu, just as they would naturally after having the illness, but without any flu symptoms, this may take 10-14 days.

Further information can be found at www.nhs.uk/child-flu.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/feverchildren/pages/introduction.aspx



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