



# Immunising **flu**

primary school children against

**This information is for headteachers and school staff.** It gives details about the nasal flu vaccine being offered to children in the autumn term of 2017. It is not intended for children or parents/guardians as they will receive their own dedicated information at the appropriate time.

## Introduction

Over the last two years, schools have supported the delivery of flu vaccination for primary school aged children in specified year groups by hosting vaccination sessions for their children. This is part of a programme that is designed to provide both individual protection to children who receive the vaccine and to prevent the spread of flu to their family and community.

Evidence from the children's programme indicates that there has been a positive impact on flu levels, both for the vaccinated children and the wider community. This has meant that there has been less illness in the community with fewer GP consultations, hospital admissions, and emergency department attendances. Flu vaccination of school-aged children also helps to promote a healthy school environment and may reduce absenteeism amongst pupils and staff.

We would like to thank schools for their engagement and their vital contribution to this programme. Last year the national flu vaccine uptake rates in schools were encouraging, with more parents agreeing for their children to be vaccinated than in the first year of the programme.



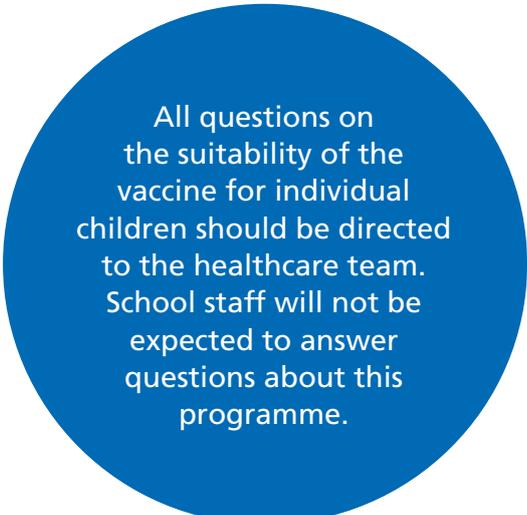
## The programme in 2017

### Which children will be offered the vaccine in 2017?

This year, the programme is being extended to all children in year 4. In addition, reception age children, who were previously offered the vaccine in general practice, will now be offered it in schools. That means that all children from reception class through to those in year 4 will be offered flu vaccination.

### What is the purpose of the programme?

The extension of the national flu immunisation programme to children is based on the advice from an independent expert committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which advises the Government on vaccination policies. Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children, with serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia. Annual immunisation provides important protection to individual children and helps reduce the spread of flu to their friends, families and the wider community, protecting younger siblings, grandparents and others who are at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from flu.



All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the healthcare team. School staff will not be expected to answer questions about this programme.

### When do the vaccinations need to be given?

To be effective, vaccinations need to be given between October and December as this is before flu tends to circulate.

Flu viruses can change year on year. Consequently, vaccines are made each year to provide protection against the flu viruses that are predicted to circulate, and therefore the vaccine needs to be given on an annual basis.

## The role of schools and school staff

### Why is vaccination offered in schools rather than general practice?

JCVI recommended offering vaccination through schools as the most effective route to deliver immunisations to school-aged children. Pilots undertaken before the national roll-out showed uptake levels in schools that were markedly higher compared to those areas that did not deliver through them. For this reason, reception age children will now be offered the vaccine in school, rather than general practice as previously, because it is anticipated that this will improve vaccination rates in this age group.

There are only a couple of areas in the country where provision to school-aged children will be through primary care settings.

### When will schools be contacted?

The local healthcare team contracted to provide flu vaccination should be in touch during the summer term to confirm arrangements with you for the autumn. If you want more information and have not been contacted by the relevant local healthcare team, you can contact your local NHS England Team via [www.england.nhs.uk/about/regional-area-teams](http://www.england.nhs.uk/about/regional-area-teams) – select the relevant region, then select the 'contact us' link to find details of your local office.

### What will schools be asked to do?

As in previous years, you will be asked to:

- work with the healthcare team to develop and agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school. The more time that is given to planning, the more likely it is that the programme will run smoothly
- agree a date for the vaccination session and provide a suitable location for the immunisation to take place (e.g. school hall or classroom)
- agree a process for providing parents with the invitation letter, information leaflet and consent form.

Local healthcare teams will work with schools to ensure minimum disruption and schools will only be asked to help with tasks that cannot easily be done by the healthcare team.

Delivery of the programme will be dependent on local circumstances, commissioning arrangements, and schools agreeing to host the vaccination session.

## The nasal flu vaccine

- Almost all eligible children will be able to have the vaccine as a nasal spray (up the nose), which is a quick and painless process.
- Serious side effects are uncommon but many children can develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, some tiredness or loss of appetite that lasts for a short period.
- The 'Protecting your child against flu' leaflet provides more information for parents on the vaccine, including how it works and contraindications.



Where schools do not agree to host sessions then children may need to be released from school to receive their vaccine elsewhere.

### Who will be giving the vaccine to the children?

The programme will be delivered by a healthcare team which may include nurses, healthcare support workers, administrative staff, and other associated professions. They may be part of the school health service, or from another team dedicated to providing vaccinations in schools. The team will administer the vaccination and will work to nationally set standards. Staff will have appropriate qualifications and training, including safeguarding training.

### How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

The healthcare team will provide a letter, information leaflet and consent form which will seek parental consent. Ideally this will be sent home from school with the child. It should be signed by parents or guardians and returned by the deadline agreed with the team. In most cases the healthcare team will ask that parents return these forms to the school and they will collect them from you.

### How will the healthcare team identify the children to be vaccinated?

The healthcare team will have a list of all eligible children for whom consent has been received. They may ask the class teacher or assistant to confirm the identity of younger children before giving the vaccination.

### Who decides whether a child receives the vaccination?

Parents or guardians with parental responsibility make this decision. Only children for whom consent has been received will be vaccinated. The healthcare

team will make all decisions regarding whether a child should receive the vaccination on the day, taking into account information on the consent form and, for example, whether the child is well at the time.

### Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccination is not mandatory. Parents will need to give their informed consent for the vaccination. The nasal flu vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (derived from pigs). Some faith groups may or may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is solely one for the child's parents/guardians.

The healthcare team will provide an information leaflet with each consent form and their contact details for additional parental queries.

### What happens if a child is not present on the day when vaccination is offered in the school?

This will depend on local arrangements and the healthcare team will discuss second opportunity arrangements with you and parents.

### What should be done if a child becomes unwell after receiving the vaccination?

If the healthcare team is still on site, seek advice directly from them. If the healthcare team have left the site, manage the situation according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school and contact the healthcare team to ensure they are aware and can report any event related to the timing of administration of the vaccine.

## Benefit to schools

- Helps protect children against flu which in turn may reduce pupil and staff absenteeism rates.
- Promotes a healthy working environment in schools and the wider community, including amongst parents and family.
- The engagement in public health programmes, including vaccination, is recognised by OFSTED as being important and will help with requirement for schools to evidence they are meeting criteria pertaining to personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE).
- Provides an opportunity to integrate learning about the benefits of vaccination into the school curriculum including history and science.

### Can unvaccinated contacts catch flu from the nasal spray droplets or from vaccinated individuals 'shedding' the virus?

The nasal spray vaccine has a good safety record and unvaccinated contacts are not at risk of catching flu from the vaccine, either through being in the same room where flu vaccine has been given or by being in contact with a recently vaccinated individual. Although vaccinated children are known to shed virus for a few days after vaccination, it is less able to spread from person to person than the natural infection. The amount of virus shed is normally below the levels needed to pass on infection to others and the virus does not survive for long outside of the body. This is in contrast to natural flu infection, which spreads easily during the flu season.

Excluding children from school during the period when the vaccine is being offered, or in the following weeks, is therefore not considered necessary. The only exception to this would be the tiny number of children who are extremely immunocompromised (for example

those who have just had a bone marrow transplant). These children are normally advised not to attend school anyway because of the much higher risk of being in contact with other infections, including the natural flu infection, that spread in schools.

### Can teachers have the vaccine?

Not as part of this programme. The nasal flu vaccine used for children is not licensed for adults. Some schools, however, may choose to provide an injectable vaccine for their teachers through their own occupational health services.

Staff with certain medical conditions that put them more at risk of flu, or who are pregnant, are entitled to free flu vaccination (injectable vaccine) through the NHS. Eligible staff should contact their GP practice. See [www.nhs.uk/flujab](http://www.nhs.uk/flujab) for further information.

### Why aren't all primary school aged children being offered the vaccine?

The extension of the national flu immunisation programme to reception aged children through to those in school year 4 is part of a phased roll-out of flu immunisation to children. More birth cohorts will be included in future as the programme expands.

### Are pre-school children being offered flu vaccination in general practice?

Yes, all children who are aged two and three years old on 31 August 2017 will be offered flu vaccination through general practice. This year, four year olds will be offered the vaccine at school rather than through general practice as previously.

### Why are all primary school age children being offered the vaccine in some areas?

Five areas around the country piloted the programme from 2013 to 2015. These former pilot areas will continue to offer the vaccine to all primary school-aged children.

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## Further information

Further updates on the national flu immunisation programme will be added to the Public Health England website in the lead up to the 2017/18 flu season at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme)

For more information on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation see: [www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation](http://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation)

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