

# protect yourself

catch the vaccine  
not the flu



**Health**  
Promotion  
Agency

## What is flu?

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

Flu is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, aching muscles, cough and sore throat - and because flu is a virus antibiotics won't help.

Every winter the flu comes around, but the virus is always changing. Even if you've had flu or the vaccine last year it won't protect you this year.

## How serious is flu?

At best it's a nasty experience, even for people who are usually fit and healthy. At worst it can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia which may need hospital treatment.

So don't take a chance - make sure you don't get the flu by getting the flu vaccine.



# Who should get the flu 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;
  - any other serious medical condition - check with your doctor if you are unsure.
- Children who have previously been admitted to hospital with a chest infection.
- Anyone living in a residential or nursing home should be vaccinated because flu can be spread rapidly.

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 flu vaccine give you flu?

NO! The vaccine does not contain a live virus, so it cannot cause flu.

## When is the best time to be vaccinated?

It is important that you get your flu vaccination in October or early November to be ready to fight off infection. Don't wait until there is an outbreak of flu. By that time it will be too late.

## How does the vaccine work?

About a week to 10 days after you get the 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.

## How effective is it?

Flu vaccinations are pretty effective. There are many different types of flu and the vaccine will protect against the most common ones. A small number of people may get the flu even after vaccination, but it is likely to be a milder dose than if they had not been vaccinated.

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

## 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 do I get the vaccine?

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

## For more information about the flu vaccine:

Talk to your GP, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist.

Alternative formats and translations in a range of minority ethnic languages are available. For further details contact the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland.



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