

Winter vaccination FAQs

7 October 2025

Many people may have questions or concerns about vaccines, especially due to misinformation or past experiences.

These messages are designed to support brief, confident conversations that address common concerns, build trust, and encourage uptake – particularly among those most at risk.

Using the EASE model to address vaccine concerns

When talking with individuals or communities about vaccine myths or concerns, the EASE model can help:

- Empathy – Listen and acknowledge concerns.
“I understand why you may feel unsure.”
- Ask – Use open questions to explore hesitations.
“What makes you feel hesitant?”
- Share – Give clear, respectful, fact-based information.
“The vaccine is safe and approved by the MHRA.”
- Encourage – Support informed choice without pressure.
“It’s your decision – I’m here if you have questions.”

Adult flu vaccine

Why should I have the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine helps protect against flu, which can be a serious or life-threatening illness. It's offered on the NHS every year in autumn or early winter to people at higher risk of getting seriously ill from flu.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is recommended for people at higher risk of getting seriously ill from flu. It's safe and effective.

For an up-to-date list of eligibility visit the [NHS website](#).

The NHS National Booking System is open for all eligible people to book flu vaccinations.

Where can I get my flu jab?

Anyone eligible can book their flu vaccine through the [NHS National Booking System](#), the NHS App or by calling 119 if you can't get online.

You can have the NHS flu vaccine at:

- your GP surgery
- [a pharmacy offering the service](#)
- your midwifery service if you're pregnant
- a hospital appointment.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a sudden high temperature
- an aching body
- feeling tired or exhausted
- a dry cough
- a sore throat
- a headache
- difficulty sleeping
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- feeling sick and being sick.

For more information about flu and how to treat it visit the [NHS website](#).

I got the vaccine last year, is there a need to be vaccinated this year?

If you had the flu vaccination last year, you need another one this year. Protection from flu vaccination goes down with time. Also, the flu viruses can change from one winter to the next. Flu vaccines are updated for each winter to give protection against the strains of flu that are most likely to be circulating. We strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

Can you get a flu vaccine privately?

If you are not eligible for the free flu vaccination, you can pay to receive the flu vaccine from a pharmacy.

Will the flu jab give me flu?

No. The injected flu vaccine does **not** contain live viruses and **cannot** cause flu.

Some people may get mild side effects like a sore arm, slight fever, or aching muscles for a day or two.

Will the flu jab weaken my immune system?

No, vaccines strengthen immune response through controlled exposure.

Who should not have the flu vaccine?

Most people can have the flu vaccine. You should **not** have it if you've had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose or an ingredient in the vaccine.

Some flu vaccines contain egg protein, so let the vaccinator know if you have an egg allergy.

What are the ingredients in the flu vaccines?

There are several types of flu vaccine used in the UK. If you're eligible, you'll be offered the one best suited to you. You can check the full list of ingredients in the vaccine's patient information leaflet.

Children's flu programme

Do school children get offered the flu vaccine?

Yes. Around 8 million children in reception to year 11 will be offered the free nasal spray flu vaccine, delivered in schools by immunisation teams up and down the country.

How do pre-schoolers get the vaccine?

Children aged 2 and 3 (on or before 31 August 2025) can get a free flu vaccine from their GP. Most will receive a quick and painless nasal spray.

If the nasal spray isn't suitable (for medical or religious reasons), an injected flu vaccine is available instead.

Why should children get the flu vaccine?

Children can catch and spread flu easily. Vaccinating them also helps protect others who are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from flu, such as babies, anyone who's pregnant and older people.

Can flu harm children?

Yes. Flu can lead to serious illness, hospitalisation, and in rare cases, death. In 2022/23, over 6,000 under-5s in England were hospitalised with flu.

Most children get it through their school, so parents should make sure to sign and return the consent form. For pre-schoolers, parents will be invited to bring their child forward in the coming weeks, or alternatively you can contact your GP practice to make an appointment. From 1 October 2025, flu vaccinations for 2 and 3 years olds will also be available from many community pharmacies.

How does the nasal spray work?

The nasal spray contains weakened viruses that help build immunity. It works quickly, and even if your child sneezes after, the vaccine still works.

Are there any side-effects of the nasal spray?

Children may develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness, and some loss of appetite. However, these are much milder than developing flu or complications associated with flu. Serious side-effects are uncommon.

What if my child has a health condition?

Some health conditions put children at higher risk of serious illness from flu, even if the condition is well managed. These include:

- Asthma needing regular steroids
- Heart, kidney, or liver disease
- Diabetes
- Weakened immune system (e.g. cancer treatment)
- Spleen problems (e.g. sickle cell or coeliac disease)
- Nervous system conditions (e.g. cerebral palsy)

These children should have a flu vaccine every year from age 6 months.

Children under 2 will be offered an injection, as the nasal spray isn't suitable for them. If you're unsure whether your child needs the vaccine, speak to your GP, nurse, or health visitor.

Does the nasal vaccine contain pork gelatine?

Yes. The nasal spray contains a highly processed form of porcine (pork) gelatine, used to help the vaccine work properly.

It offers the best protection for children and helps reduce the spread of flu.

If you do not wish your child to have this due to religious or other reasons, an injected flu vaccine is available. Talk to your nurse, doctor, or immunisation team about your options.

Flu in pregnancy

I'm pregnant, is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. Studies have shown that it's safe to have a flu vaccine during any stage of pregnancy, from the first few weeks up until you go into labour.

A flu jab will help protect both you and your baby.

There is good evidence that pregnant women have a higher chance of developing complications if they get flu, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. Young babies also have a higher risk of getting seriously ill if they get flu.

It's also safe to breastfeed if you had the flu vaccine while pregnant.

When should I get the flu jab if I'm pregnant?

You can get the flu vaccine from September.

It's best to get vaccinated as soon as you can, especially if you're near to your due date. Getting vaccinated will help protect your baby in the first few months after they're born.

How do I get the flu vaccine?

The NHS will let you know in autumn or early winter when you can get your flu vaccine.

You will be able to get a flu vaccine from:

- your GP surgery
- a pharmacy that offers flu vaccination (18 or over.)

Some people may be able to get vaccinated through their maternity service.

Can I have the flu jab at the same time as other vaccines?

You can have a flu vaccine at the same time as other pregnancy vaccinations, but it's best to have them as soon as they're offered rather than waiting to have them at the same time.

You should have your:

- flu vaccine as soon as possible when it becomes available (usually from September)
- [whooping cough vaccine](#) at around 20 weeks pregnant

- [RSV vaccine](#) from 28 weeks pregnant.

Flu and long-term health conditions

What about those with long-term health conditions?

Individuals with certain long-term health conditions are eligible for a free flu vaccine. Conditions that would make someone eligible include those with:

- Heart or liver disease
- Chronic respiratory disease
- Diabetes
- Immunosuppression (weakened immune system)
- Some neurological conditions (like Parkinson's, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy)

For more information about the flu vaccine visit the [NHS website](#).

COVID-19

Where can you get the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you're eligible for an NHS COVID-19 vaccine, you can get it from:

- GP practices offering the COVID-19 vaccine
- community pharmacies that offer the COVID-19 vaccine

Some people may be able to get the vaccine through their care home.

Who can have the COVID-19 vaccine?

For an up-to-date list of eligibility visit the [NHS website](#).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 symptoms can include:

- a high temperature or shivering (chills) – you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- shortness of breath
- feeling tired or exhausted
- an aching body
- a headache
- a sore throat
- a blocked or runny nose
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick or being sick.

RSV

What is the RSV vaccine for?

The RSV vaccine helps protect against [respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#).

RSV is a common cause of coughs and colds. Most people get it several times during their life.

Getting RSV can also make your symptoms worse if you have a lung condition. The RSV vaccine helps reduce the risk of serious breathing problems like pneumonia and bronchiolitis.

Who is at risk from RSV?

RSV infections are very common. Almost all children get them at least once before they're 2 years old.

They're not usually serious, but some babies and adults have a higher risk of getting seriously ill, particularly:

- babies under 6 months old
- young children who were born prematurely
- adults over 75 years
- babies, children and adults with a weakened immune system, or long-term lung or heart conditions
- people who smoke tobacco and babies exposed to tobacco smoke.

In babies, RSV is a common cause of a type of chest infection called bronchiolitis. This can cause breathing problems and may need to be treated in hospital.

RSV can also cause a serious lung infection (pneumonia) in babies and older adults.

Who is offered the RSV vaccine?

For an up-to-date list of eligibility visit the [NHS website](#).

The vaccine helps reduce the risk of RSV causing serious problems such as pneumonia and bronchiolitis.

Is the RSV vaccine safe for my baby?

Studies have shown that having the vaccine during pregnancy is much safer than the risk of your baby getting RSV.

Many thousands of pregnant women have now had the RSV vaccine around the world.

If you're pregnant, you should have the vaccine during every pregnancy. This will help make sure each baby is protected for the first 6 months after they're born, when they're most likely to get seriously ill if they get RSV.

For more information, visit Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System Vaccinations and Immunisations webpage: <https://staffsstokeics.org.uk/your-health-and-care/vaccinations-and-immunisations/>

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