

School Immunisation Service  
Whitley Health and Social Services Centre  
Northumberland Avenue  
Whitley  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG2 7PJ

Telephone: 0118 9207 575

Email: [Bks-tr.SchoolimmunisationTeam@nhs.net](mailto:Bks-tr.SchoolimmunisationTeam@nhs.net)

June 2016

Dear Parent/Carer,

**Annual invitation for Seasonal flu vaccination against influenza for children/young educated in Year 1 to Year 13 who attend Special Schools**

All children educated in Year 1 to Year 13 who attend special schools are due their annual seasonal nasal flu vaccination this autumn 2016. As happened last year, these will be delivered in school unless your child has been called by your GP or consultant. Younger children attending special school should be invited for immunisation by their GP practice. For the majority of children this involves administration of the vaccine sprayed into each nostril. A small proportion of children will require an injection due to their medical condition or if they are 18 years or over. Flu is generally a mild illness but can cause serious complications for a small number of people, especially those with underlying medical conditions. Vaccination is the best way of protecting your child against this infection, and also benefits the wider family and community by reducing the transmission of the flu virus.

The seasonal flu immunisation is offered to children at higher risk of complications from flu because of underlying medical conditions. This vaccination is offered to all children in the school, where several children have one or more of these conditions, so that everyone is offered protection in case of an outbreak. We have attached a link to the national cartoon video. <http://www.nhs.uk/video/pages/flu-heroes-nasal-flu-spray-for-kids.aspx>

The school will notify parents/carers of the date the immunisation session will take place in school.

A link to the leaflet explaining the programme is attached and at the end of this letter are answers to some commonly asked questions about flu and the vaccination. This information includes details about children for whom the nasal spray is not appropriate. We have also attached a link to the national cartoon video.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-your-child-against-flu>

Children aged under 9 years old who have not previously been vaccinated against seasonal flu will require a second dose of vaccine at least 4 weeks after the first. This will also be offered at school or your child can be invited to a community clinic.

Nearer the time, we will send a consent form for you to complete in black ink and be signed by the parent/person with parental responsibility before returning it to the school. We will

need one form for each child. The consent form will contain more information which will enable you to make the best decision to protect your child and family against flu.

If you have any concerns about whether or not your child should receive the vaccination, you should discuss it with your GP or hospital consultant. If your child has already been immunised against flu at your GP surgery or you intend to take them there to be vaccinated it's important that this is indicated on the **non-consent** section of the form and returned to school.

Please contact a member of the school immunisation team on the above number should you have any other queries.

Yours sincerely



Val Lyons  
Schools Immunisation Service Lead

## Common questions about the children's flu vaccination

### **Why should children have the flu vaccine?**

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can often last several days. Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

### **What are the benefits of the vaccine?**

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness. It may also reduce the chance of others in your family getting it from your child. It can help you avoid having to take time off work or other activities because you are ill or need to look after your sick child.

### **How will the vaccine be given?**

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray. If there is a medical reason why your child cannot receive the immunisation by nasal spray, we will invite you to bring your child to a community clinic to receive an injection. No injections will be given in primary schools.

### **Who will give my child their flu vaccination?**

Specially trained healthcare staff will give your child the flu vaccination.

### **How does the nasal spray work?**

The nasal spray contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity. When your child comes into contact with the flu virus they will be less likely to get ill.

### **Are there any side effects of the vaccine?**

Serious side effects are uncommon. Children may commonly develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. This may last a few days. The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

### **Are there any children who shouldn't have the nasal vaccine?**

Children should not have the nasal vaccine if they:

- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past three days (vaccination should be delayed until at least three days after the wheezing has stopped)
- are severely asthmatic, i.e. being treated with oral steroids or high dose inhaled steroids
- have a condition that severely weakens their immune system or have someone in their household who needs isolation
- have severe egg allergy. Most children with egg allergy can be safely immunised with nasal flu vaccine. However, children with a history of severe egg allergy should seek specialist advice. Please check with your GP.
- are allergic to any other components of the vaccine.\*

If your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine, they should have the flu vaccine by injection. Children will not be given injections in schools and alternative arrangements will be offered for you to bring your child to a community clinic to receive the injection.

Children who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid household contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two weeks following vaccination.

**How effective is the vaccine?**

Because the flu virus can change from year to year there is always a risk that the vaccine does not match the circulating virus. During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains although last year it was not.

**Has the nasal vaccine been used in other countries?**

Yes; it has been used safely in America for many years and it was used in the previous two flu seasons in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.

**My child had the flu vaccination last year. Do they need another one this year?**

Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against strains of flu that may be different from last year. For this reason we recommend that even if vaccinated last year, your child should be vaccinated again this year.

**Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatin derived from pigs (porcine gelatin)?**

Yes. The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the vaccine viruses stable so that the vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/460069/8584-Vaccines-porcine-gelatine-2015-2P-A4-04-web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460069/8584-Vaccines-porcine-gelatine-2015-2P-A4-04-web.pdf)

**Can't my child have the injected vaccine that doesn't contain gelatin?**

The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children. It also reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other family members (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce spread so effectively and so is not being offered to healthy children as part of this programme. However, if your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Some faith groups accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to you. For further information about porcine gelatine and the nasal flu vaccine, see [www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response)