



Immunising primary school children against flu

2019 information for schools

We would like to thank your school for hosting flu vaccination sessions. For the first time this autumn all primary school aged children in England will be offered vaccination.

Every year, flu kills thousands of people. The programme helps protect children against flu, which can be a very unpleasant illness and lead to complications like bronchitis and pneumonia. The flu vaccine also helps to prevent transmission of flu to the wider community, including older family members and newborn babies who may have weaker immune systems. Research by Public Health England has shown that the flu vaccine programme has reduced illness and the numbers of people visiting their GP with flu. It has also reduced the number of hospital admissions and emergency department attendances among the children and the wider population. Research has also showed that vaccinating school-aged children reduced pupil absenteeism.

Delivering the programme through schools is the best way to ensure the maximum number of children are protected. It is very encouraging to see annual increases in uptake since the introduction of the programme, with more parents giving consent for their child to be vaccinated each year.

The local healthcare team delivering the programme in your school aims to ensure minimum disruption and only asks for help with tasks that the school is better placed to do. Your help arranging for consent forms to be sent and collected, and supporting the programme on the day, is much appreciated. We know that teachers and other members of staff are trusted by parents and can also support the programme by teaching children about the benefits of vaccination, talking to parents about the programme, and reassuring children on the day (if needed). There will be a small number of children in your school not able to have the nasal spray vaccine because they have a contraindication. They may be offered an injected vaccine instead. All questions about vaccine suitability, and whether the child can have it on the day if unwell, should be directed to the healthcare team.

Please do make this leaflet available to all staff in your school, particularly those who are likely to speak to parents or children about the vaccination.

This programme helps save lives and reduces illness. We thank you for your support.



Frequently asked questions

When do the vaccinations need to be given?

Vaccinations need to be given as far as possible between October and December before flu tends to circulate. As the flu virus can change each year, vaccination is required on an annual basis.

What will schools be asked to do?

You will be asked to:

- work with the healthcare team to agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school
- nominate a named contact for the healthcare team to liaise with
- agree a date for the vaccination session
- 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
- encourage children and their parents to look out for the consent form and return it in good time
- let parents know which day vaccination will take place and let children know what will happen.

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 professionals. The team will administer the vaccination according to nationally set standards. Staff will have appropriate qualifications and training, including safeguarding training.

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

A consent form and information leaflet provided by the healthcare team will be used to seek parental consent. Parents will also be provided with a contact number for the healthcare team in case of any queries. Signed forms should be 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.

Flu vaccine uptake in schools over last four years

	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Reception	63.9%	62.6%	33.9%*	30.0%*
Year 1	63.4%	61.0%	57.6%	54.4%
Year 2	61.4%	60.4%	55.4%	52.9%
Year 3	60.2%	57.6%	53.3%	N/A
Year 4	58.0%	55.8%	N/A	N/A
Year 5	56.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Offered in general practice not schools

How else could the school support the programme?

The school could further support the programme by sending information and reminders through your usual channels such as email or text distribution lists, parent newsletters, visual display screens etc.

Does GDPR change how consent needs to be obtained?

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) became UK law on 25 May 2018. **No change** is required to the way in which parental agreement is obtained. Schools should continue to work with the healthcare teams providing vaccinations in schools, who will provide information resources and parental consent forms.

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

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

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.

Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. 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.

What if the vaccination session is quite late in the autumn?

Because of the large number of schools, some vaccination sessions will be scheduled later in the autumn term. If parents are concerned about this because they have a child who is more at risk from flu because of an underlying health condition, these parents can ask their child's GP to vaccinate them rather than wait for the school session. See www.nhs.uk/child-flu for further information.

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 not 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 natural flu infection, that spread in schools.

Can teachers have the vaccine?

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

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

The nasal flu vaccine

- Almost all 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.
- There are some children for whom the nasal spray is contraindicated and so are unable to receive it. All questions about suitability should be directed to the healthcare team.
- If a child is unwell on the day, the healthcare team will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not.
- The 'Protecting your child against flu' leaflet provides more information for parents on the vaccine, including how it works and contraindications.



All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the healthcare team

Benefit to schools

- Helps protect children against flu which in turn may reduce pupil and staff absenteeism rates.
- 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.
- Promotes a healthy working environment in schools and the wider community, including amongst parents and family.

Further information about the programme can be found at www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme including:

- 'Protecting your child against flu' leaflet
- 'Five reasons to vaccinate your child against flu' poster

