



# Flu vaccination 2020 to 2021 Programme briefing for schools

**The flu vaccination programme in schools will be going ahead in the autumn term. It is likely that flu and COVID-19 will both be circulating at the same time which means that it is more important than ever this year to help protect against flu.**

As well as all primary school aged children being offered the flu vaccine, this coming season the Government is extending the programme to year 7 children in secondary schools.

Flu kills thousands of people every year. It is an unpredictable virus and the vaccine is the best protection we have against it. The main purpose of the school-aged annual flu vaccination programme is to reduce transmission in the community.

Children can pass flu on to others in their immediate family and wider community, many of whom may be at higher risk from the complications of flu. The flu vaccination won't protect against COVID-19 but it is critical to protecting the general health of the population, particularly those at high risk from COVID-19.

All children whose parents agree for them to have the vaccine, which is given by way of a nasal spray, also benefit from the protection it provides to them as individuals. It helps to contribute to a healthy school environment, reduces school absences, and indirectly protects teachers as they are less likely to catch flu from their pupils.

We are grateful for the support that schools have given by hosting NHS vaccination sessions. Delivering the programme this year could be more difficult because of policies to reduce transmission of COVID-19. Your local healthcare team will work with you to deliver the programme according to guidelines that are current at the time. This may involve doing things differently this year.

Schools have a key role in promoting uptake of the flu vaccination programme through the relationship that you have with parents. Please use all your communication channels to help promote uptake. Since the introduction of the programme, flu vaccine uptake has increased every year amongst school children (see page 3). This year we would like a concerted effort to increase it substantially as we need to reduce the impact of flu on the NHS and social care.

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

## Benefits to schools

Helps protect children against flu which in turn reduces pupil and staff absenteeism rates

Promotes a healthy working environment in schools and the wider community, including amongst the children's immediate and extended family

Reduces the likelihood of flu outbreaks in schools, where symptoms may be confused with those of COVID-19

The engagement in NHS public health programmes, including vaccination, is recognised by OFSTED as being important and provides an opportunity to discuss vaccinations as part of Health Education, which is compulsory in primary and secondary schools from September 2020

Provides an opportunity to integrate learning about the benefits of vaccination into the school curriculum including history and science

# Frequently asked questions

## Why is flu vaccination for children important?

Flu is unpredictable. It can be a serious illness that leads to complications like bronchitis and pneumonia, and painful ear infection in children. Children under the age of 5 years old have the highest rate of hospital admission of any age group. On average an estimated 17,000 people die from flu each year in England. However, in a bad flu year deaths can be much higher, such as in 2014/15 when there were over 28,000 deaths.

A long-standing vaccination programme has been in place to protect those most at risk from the complications of flu (such as pregnant women, older people, and those with underlying health conditions). Since 2013 a phased roll-out to children has been implemented. The purpose is to help protect the children themselves and to stop them spreading it to their families and the wider community, given the role that children have in transmission of the flu virus.

## Why does COVID-19 mean the school's flu vaccination programme is so important this year?

Many of those who are vulnerable if they get COVID-19 are also those most at risk from the complications of flu. This year it is really important that we help to keep these people well by reducing the chances of them getting flu. We also want to reduce pressure on the NHS. Those at risk from flu will be offered the flu vaccine for their own protection but we also want to reduce flu transmission in the community by vaccinating children.

There are also benefits for the school from vaccinating the children against flu. It helps to provide a healthy school environment by protecting the pupils and, indirectly, the staff. Research has shown that the programme has reduced school absences. This year, given the disruption that there has already been to education, it is important to reduce any further time lost by pupils being away from school. It will also reduce the disruption to schools from flu outbreaks and the confusion that this may cause given that many of the symptoms of flu are similar to COVID-19 symptoms.

## Why is the programme being extended to Year 7 children?

This year we have secured additional vaccine to enable us to extend the programme into secondary schools in 2020/21. This is part of our wider planning for winter, as we are likely to see both flu and COVID-19 circulating at the same time. Although it is the first time Year 7 pupils will be offered the vaccine nationally, these pupils will have been offered the flu vaccine when they were in primary school so both they and their parents will be familiar with the programme. We ask you to work with your local healthcare team as you have done in the past with other vaccine programmes delivered through secondary schools.

## What will the school be asked to do?

Your local healthcare team will try and keep disruption to a minimum and will only ask you to do the things that they cannot do themselves.

Schools (including the new Year 7 cohort) 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(s) for the vaccination session
- provide a suitable location for the immunisation to take place (e.g. school hall)
- 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 by an agreed time
- send reminders through your usual channels such as email or text distribution lists, parent newsletters, visual display screens etc.
- endorse the programme on your website etc.
- let parents know which day vaccination will take place and let children know what will happen.

## How will the programme be different this year?

Your local healthcare team will work with you to deliver the programme according to guidelines on reducing transmission of COVID-19 that are current at the time. This may involve doing things differently this year.

## Why are children offered a nasal spray?

Children are offered a nasal spray as it is quick, painless and is more effective in children than an injectable vaccine.

There will be a small number of children in your school not able to have the nasal spray vaccine because of pre-existing medical conditions or treatments. They may be offered an injected vaccine instead (either at school or alternatively they will be asked to go to their GP practice for it).

All questions about vaccine suitability, and whether the child can have it on the day if unwell, should be directed to the healthcare team.

## When do the vaccinations need to be given?

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

## Flu vaccine uptake in schools since introduction of programme

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Reception	64.3%	64.3%	62.6%	33.9%*	30.0%*
Year 1	63.6%	63.6%	61.0%	57.6%	54.4%
Year 2	62.6%	61.5%	60.4%	55.4%	52.9%
Year 3	60.6%	60.4%	57.6%	53.3%	N/A
Year 4	59.6%	58.3%	55.8%	N/A	N/A
Year 5	57.2%	56.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Year 6	55.0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*Offered in general practice not schools

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

The programme will be delivered by an NHS healthcare team which may include nurses, healthcare support workers, administrative staff, and other associated professionals who specialise in delivery of school aged vaccinations. The team will administer the vaccination according to nationally set standards. Staff will have appropriate qualifications and training, including safeguarding training. Depending upon the advice that is current at the time, staff administering the vaccine may need to be wearing personal protective equipment.

### 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. Forms should be returned by the deadline agreed with the team. You may be asked to collect these forms from parents on behalf of the healthcare team or it may be done electronically.

### How else could the school support the programme?

We know that teachers and other members of staff are trusted by parents and can 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).

### 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.

## 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 who cannot have the nasal spray because of pre-existing medical conditions or treatments. 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 information on those children who are unable to have it

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



## 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. It is therefore worth reminding parents of the importance of completing the consent form they are sent ahead of the scheduled vaccination sessions.

## 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 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?

For any children absent on the vaccination day, there will be catch up arrangements in place that the healthcare team will be able to share with the school.

## What should be done if a child becomes unwell in school 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 in my school is quite late in the autumn?

For children who are at risk because they have an underlying health condition, it is very important that they get the flu vaccine for their own protection. 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](http://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 the school's 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](http://www.nhs.uk/flujab) for further information.