



Immunising flu

primary school children against

This leaflet for headteachers and school staff answers a number of questions you may have about the nasal spray flu vaccine being offered to children in the autumn term of 2018

Over the last three years primary school aged children have been offered flu vaccination in a national roll-out of the programme. We would like to thank schools for hosting vaccination sessions. It would not be possible to do this without your ongoing support. Each year we have seen more parents agree for their child to be vaccinated, with the majority of parents giving consent for their children to have the vaccine (see table inside).

In 2018 flu vaccination will be offered in primary schools to all children in reception class through to Year 5. Preschool children aged two and three years old will be offered the vaccine through their GP surgery.

The extension of the national flu immunisation programme to children is based on the advice from an independent expert committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which advises the Government on vaccination policies.

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children, with serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia. The programme is designed to provide both individual protection to children who receive the vaccine and to prevent the spread of flu to their family and community.

Evidence from the children's programme indicates that there has been a positive impact on flu levels, both for the vaccinated children and the wider community. This has meant that there has been less illness in the community, and fewer GP consultations, hospital admissions, and emergency department attendances. Flu vaccination of school-aged children also helps to promote a healthy school environment and may reduce absenteeism amongst pupils and staff.



Frequently asked questions

When do the vaccinations need to be given?

To be effective, vaccinations need to be given between October and December as this is before flu tends to circulate. As the flu virus can change each year, vaccination is required on an annual basis. The local healthcare team contracted to deliver the flu vaccination will be in touch to confirm arrangements with you for the autumn.

What will schools be asked to do?

As in previous years, you will be asked to:

- work with the healthcare team to develop and agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school
- 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.

We are grateful for your on-going support with the programme and for agreeing to host the vaccination session. Local healthcare teams will work with schools to ensure minimum disruption and schools will only be asked to help with tasks that cannot easily be done by the healthcare team.

Please note, on the rare occasion when schools do not agree to host sessions children may need to be released from school to receive their vaccine elsewhere.

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 professions. They may be part of the school health service, or from another team dedicated to providing vaccinations in schools. The team will administer the vaccination and will work to nationally set standards. Staff will have appropriate qualifications and training, including safeguarding training.

Flu vaccine uptake in schools over last three years

	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Reception class	62.6%	33.9%*	30.0%*
Year 1	61.0%	57.6%	54.4%
Year 2	60.4%	55.4%	52.9%
Year 3	57.6%	53.3%	N/A
Year 4	55.8%	N/A	N/A

*Offered in general practice not schools

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

The healthcare team will provide a letter, information leaflet and consent form which will seek parental consent. Ideally this will be sent home from school with the child. It should be signed by parents or guardians and 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.

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

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

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. The healthcare team will make all decisions regarding whether a child should receive the vaccination on the day, taking into account information on the consent form and, for example, whether the child is well at the time.

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 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.

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.

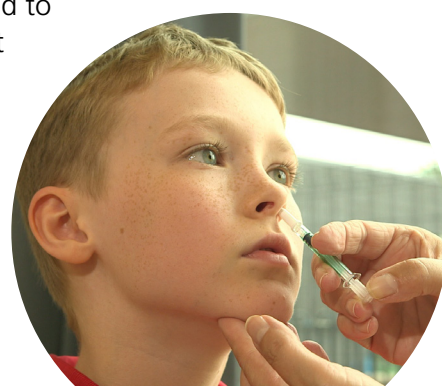
Excluding children from school during the period when the vaccine is being offered, or in the following weeks, is therefore not considered necessary. The only exception to this would be the tiny number of children who are extremely immunocompromised (for example those who have just had a bone marrow 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 the natural flu infection, that spread in schools.

Can teachers have the vaccine?

Not as part of this programme. The nasal flu vaccine used for children is not licensed for adults. Some schools, however, may choose to provide an injectable vaccine for their teachers through their own occupational health services. Staff with certain medical conditions that put them more at risk of flu, or who are pregnant, are entitled to free flu vaccination (injectable vaccine) through the NHS. Eligible staff should contact their GP practice. See www.nhs.uk/flujab for further information.

Why is vaccination offered in schools rather than general practice?

JCVI recommended offering vaccination through schools as the most effective route to deliver immunisations to school-aged children. Pilots undertaken before the national roll-out showed uptake levels in schools that were markedly higher compared to those areas that did not deliver through them.



The nasal flu vaccine

- Almost all eligible 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.
- 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. School staff will not be expected to answer questions about this programme.

Benefit to schools

- 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.
- 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).
- Helps protect children against flu which in turn may reduce pupil and staff absenteeism rates.

