



Let's talk

**FLU VACCINATION  
SERVICE**

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against 4 strains of flu virus. These are the strains most likely to be circulating this flu season. The vaccine is available every year to adults and children at risk of the flu and its complications.

## WHAT IS SEASONAL FLU (INFLUENZA) AND ITS SYMPTOMS?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a common and highly infectious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus that infects the nose, throat, and lungs. It can range from mild to severe and can have serious complications.

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle and body aches
- Extreme fatigue

## WHAT ARE THE FACTS ABOUT FLU?

- Vaccination is your best defence against flu
- Getting the flu vaccine during pregnancy helps protect mother and baby against the flu
- You cannot get flu from this vaccine
- Healthy people can have flu without any obvious symptoms and pass it on
- Flu can be spread by an infected person before their symptoms begin, and they are infectious from the day before symptoms start until 5-7 days later

## HOW IS THE VACCINE GIVEN?

The flu vaccine injection is administered with a needle and is usually given in the arm or thigh depending on age.

The nasal spray vaccine is administered as a single spray in each nostril of the child's nose. The child can breathe normally while getting the vaccine. There is no need to take a deep breath or sniff. This vaccine is not painful and is absorbed quickly. It will work even if the child has a runny nose, sneezes, or blows their nose after the vaccination.

Most children need only 1 dose of the vaccine each year. Some children aged 2 - 8 years with chronic health conditions (e.g. chronic heart or lung conditions) may need 2 doses if they have never had a flu vaccine. The doses are given 4 weeks apart.



## HOW DOES THE FLU VACCINE INJECTION WORK?

This vaccine does not contain a live virus so it cannot give you the flu.

The flu vaccine stimulates the immune system to make antibodies to attack the flu virus. If you are exposed to the flu virus after you have had the flu vaccine, your immune system will recognise the virus and immediately produce antibodies to fight it.

## HOW DOES THE CHILDREN'S NASAL SPRAY FLU VACCINE WORK?

The vaccine contains live but weakened flu viruses that do not cause flu in children.

It will help your child build up immunity to the flu in a similar way to natural infection, but without the symptoms, thereby offering better long-term protection to children than inactivated influenza vaccine injection.

## HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THE VACCINES?

Getting the flu vaccine is the best way to help protect you or your child from getting the flu. It will not stop all flu viruses and the level of protection may vary, so it's not 100% effective and you or your child may still get the flu.

However, if you do get the flu after you have the vaccine, it's likely to be milder and you will recover more quickly.

Flu vaccines usually reduce the risk of infection by 40-60%.

## Flu vaccines also reduce:

- The severity of illness
- Complications from influenza
- Flu-related hospitalisations
- Admissions to critical care units

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Flu vaccine injections have been given to millions of people worldwide for over 60 years, including pregnant women. Reactions to the vaccine are generally mild.

Recently, in Ireland, the children's nasal spray flu vaccine was introduced and is used for children aged 2-12 years inclusive and 13-17 years who are medically 'at-risk' with long-term health conditions (where suitable). The nasal spray flu vaccine has been used successfully and safely for several years in other countries and millions of doses of the vaccine have been given to children. Again, reactions to the vaccine are generally mild.



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## WHO SHOULD GET THE SEASONAL FLU VACCINE?

It is recommended that everyone aged 6 months onwards should get vaccinated this flu season, with few exceptions.

Some people are more at risk of getting complications if they catch flu such as:

- Anybody aged 65 years and over
- Pregnant women
- Children aged 2-12 years at the time of vaccination
- Anybody aged 6 to 23 months and aged 13-64 years with a long-term health condition or with an occupation such as:
  - › Chronic heart disease, including acute coronary syndrome
  - › Chronic liver disease
  - › Chronic renal failure
  - › Chronic respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis, moderate or severe asthma or bronchopulmonary dysplasia
  - › Chronic neurological disease including multiple sclerosis, hereditary and degenerative disorders of the central nervous system
  - › Diabetes mellitus
  - › Haemoglobinopathies
  - › Morbid obesity i.e., body mass index (BMI) over 40
  - › Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment (including treatment for cancer)
  - › A child with a moderate to severe neurodevelopmental disorder such as cerebral palsy
- › Anybody with Down syndrome
- › Residents of nursing homes and other long-stay institutions
- › Healthcare workers
- › Carers and household contacts of people at increased risk of flu because of medical conditions
- › Anybody with regular close contact with poultry, waterfowl, or pigs



## WHO SHOULD NOT GET THE FLU VACCINE INJECTION?

- Anybody with a history of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or with an allergy to any of the vaccine ingredients
- Anybody taking medicines called combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g., ipilimumab plus nivolumab) should not receive the flu vaccine because of a possible risk of immune reactions
- Anybody who has severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell)
- Anybody with an egg or chicken protein allergy must see their GP to be vaccinated or may need to be referred to a hospital specialist
- Anybody unwell with a high temperature of more than 38°C. In this case, vaccination will have to be postponed
- Anybody who has had a bilateral (double) mastectomy must see their GP to be vaccinated or may need to be referred to a hospital specialist





## WHO SHOULD NOT GET THE NASAL SPRAY FLU VACCINE?

- Any child who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the flu vaccine or any of its ingredients
- Any child who has severe asthma or if they have been wheezy or needed their inhaler more than usual in the 3 days before the vaccination
- Any child taking medicines called salicylates, which include aspirin
- Any child who has taken influenza antiviral medication within the previous 48 hours
- Any child who has a severely weakened immune system because of certain medical conditions or treatments
- Any child living with someone who has a severely weakened immune system - for example, a person who has to live in isolation in the months following a bone marrow transplant
- Any child who has a condition which means they leak CSF (the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord)
- Any child with severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell)
- Any child on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g., ipilimumab plus nivolumab) which are used to treat cancer
- Anybody who is pregnant

Your child may not be able to have the nasal flu vaccine if they have had a cochlear implant. The advice of the specialist looking after your child will be needed to see if your child can have the nasal flu vaccine.

You will need to seek specialist advice if your child needs regular oral steroids, or they have previously required ICU care for asthma.

If your child cannot have the nasal flu vaccine, you should speak to your GP or pharmacist about getting the vaccine as an injection.

If your child is 6 months to 2 years of age and is in a high-risk group for flu, they'll be offered a flu vaccine injection. This is because the nasal spray is not licensed for children under the age of 2.



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## DELAYING YOUR CHILD'S VACCINATION

You should delay your child's vaccination if they are not well and have a high temperature. The vaccination can be delayed until they feel better.

If your child has a very blocked or runny nose, it might stop the vaccine from getting into their system. In this case, delay the vaccine until their nose is clear.







## WHY ARE CHILDREN BEING OFFERED THE VACCINE?

By offering the flu vaccination to as many children as possible in the autumn, it will help to protect them in time for the winter. As well as protecting these vaccinated children, the infection is then less able to spread, and so it helps to protect their family members and friends.

## WHY VACCINATE YOUR CHILD?

Children with flu can have the same unpleasant symptoms as adults, including a high temperature, chills, aching muscles, a headache, a stuffy nose, a dry cough, and a sore throat lasting up to a week. Children can also be asymptomatic.

## Benefits of vaccinating your child:

- Prevents flu related illnesses
- Vaccination is safe and effective
- Protects other people
- Reduced time off work and school

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## WHEN SHOULD YOU GET THE SEASONAL FLU VACCINE?

The flu season starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

You can get the vaccine at any time during the flu season to be covered for flu season. It is recommended to get the vaccine at the start of the flu season, at the beginning of October.

To give you the most protection from catching the flu, you should get the seasonal flu vaccine every year. This is because the strains of the flu virus change and therefore, it is called seasonal flu but people commonly call it the flu.

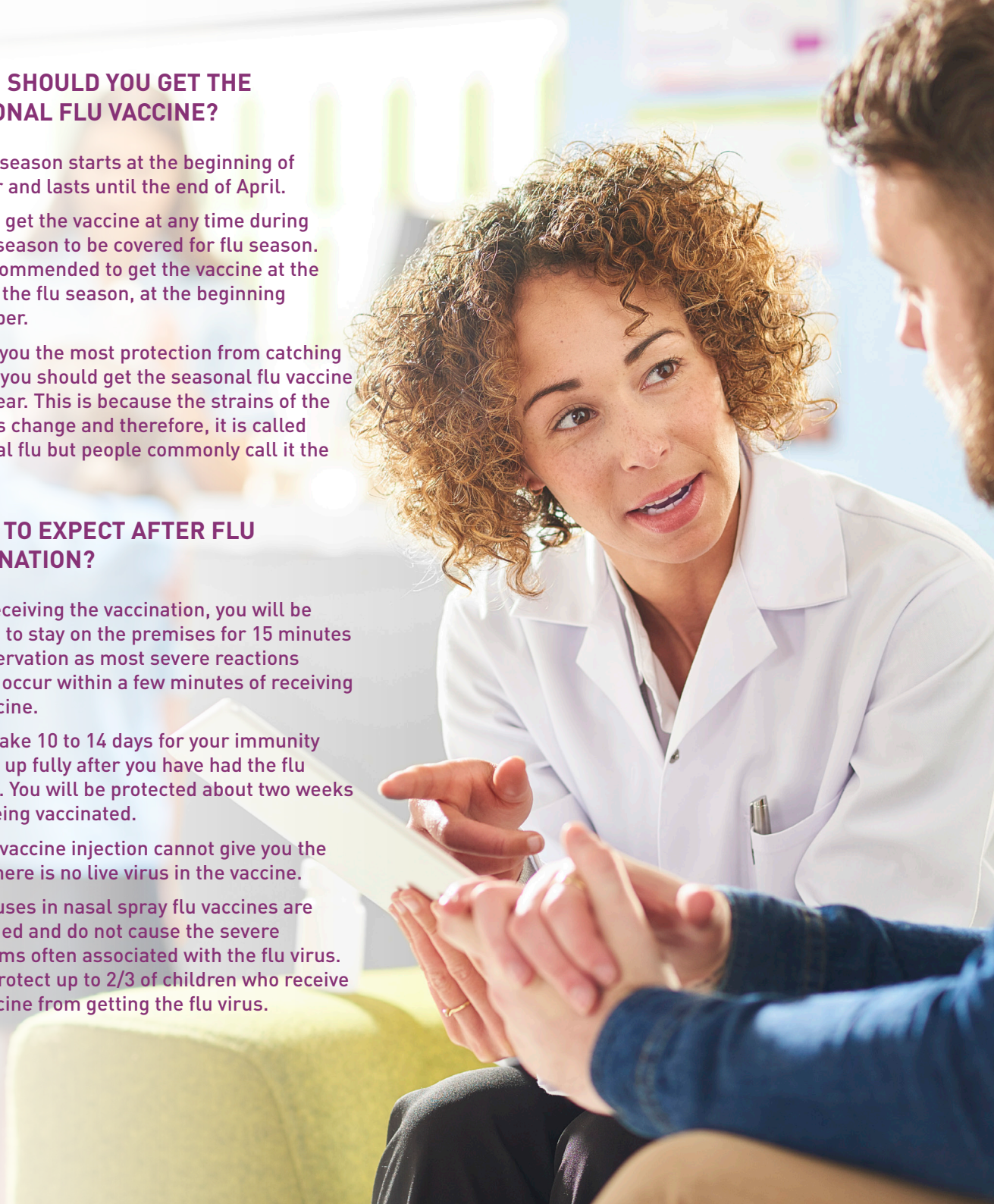
## WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER FLU VACCINATION?

After receiving the vaccination, you will be advised to stay on the premises for 15 minutes for observation as most severe reactions usually occur within a few minutes of receiving the vaccine.

It may take 10 to 14 days for your immunity to build up fully after you have had the flu vaccine. You will be protected about two weeks after being vaccinated.

The flu vaccine injection cannot give you the flu as there is no live virus in the vaccine.

The viruses in nasal spray flu vaccines are weakened and do not cause the severe symptoms often associated with the flu virus. It can protect up to 2/3 of children who receive the vaccine from getting the flu virus.









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