



# Guidance

## Flu vaccination programme 2022 to 2023: briefing for primary schools

Updated 12 July 2022

**Applies to England**

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This gives details about the flu vaccination programme for primary school-aged children, including how the programme is delivered and the role schools play.

This autumn term all primary school-aged children in England (from Reception class to Year 6) will be offered a flu vaccination by the NHS school-aged immunisation service. We are grateful for the support of schools in hosting vaccination sessions. Delivering the programme through schools makes it more accessible to pupils which results in higher uptake levels. The school-aged immunisation service will be in touch with your school in the lead-up to the season to agree on a date for the vaccination session and the best approach for implementing the programme in your school.

Flu is an unpredictable virus that can kill thousands of people during a flu season. The flu vaccine is the best defence we have against it. Vaccination of children is based on the recommendation of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the independent expert advisory group that advises government on vaccination.

The benefits include protection against flu for the children who receive the vaccine and reduced transmission of flu in the community. This is because children play a key role in the transmission of flu, including to those who may be at higher risk from the complications from flu such as the elderly.

Since the start of the programme, research has shown that vaccinating large numbers of children has reduced the circulation of flu in the community. This has reduced the number of GP consultations for flu-like illness for both the vaccinated children and the wider community and has also reduced hospital admissions from flu. For schools, the benefits include reduced absenteeism and the reduced likelihood of teachers catching flu from their pupils.

Any pupils who miss the session at school will be provided with further opportunities to get the vaccine (which may be at an alternative venue), the school-aged immunisation service will be able to provide further details.

For the small number of pupils who may be at increased risk from flu because of underlying health conditions, their parents have the option of requesting the vaccine from their GP practice if they don't want to wait for the school session, or if attending the GP practice is what they prefer.

There have been very low levels of flu activity in the last 2 years because of the measures that were in place to reduce coronavirus (COVID-19) infections, such as social distancing and mask wearing.

This means that there may be a rebound in flu levels this coming winter because people will be mixing more and they may also be more susceptible to flu as they have not been exposed to the virus. Flu vaccination plays an important part of the government's wider winter planning to reduce illness from flu, and therefore the potential impact on the NHS.

### The role of schools

Your school-aged immunisation service team will try and keep disruption to a minimum and will only ask you to do the things that they cannot do themselves.

Schools will be asked to:

- work with the school-aged immunisation service to agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school
- nominate a named contact for the school-aged immunisation service to liaise with
- agree a date(s) for the vaccination session
- provide class lists with contact details to the school-aged immunisation service
- agree a process for providing parents or guardians with the invitation letter, information leaflet and consent form so that parents or guardians can get the materials as quickly as possible.
- encourage children and their parents or guardians 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
- endorse the programme, for example on your website
- let parents know which day vaccination will take place
- let children know what will happen and answer any questions parents and children have on the logistics and date of vaccinations

Other practical considerations include:

- provide a suitable location for the vaccination to take place (for example the school hall), you may want to share a photo of your space with the school-aged immunisation service
- ensure the school-aged immunisation service can access the agreed space before the vaccinations are due to start, so they can set-up
- provide suitable sized tables and chairs for the team and if possible, access to a power supply with extension cables

### Benefits to schools

Benefits to schools include:

- helps protect children against flu which in turn reduces pupil and staff absenteeism rates
- 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
- promotes a healthy environment in schools and the wider community, including amongst the children's immediate and extended family
- reduces the likelihood of flu outbreaks in schools
- provides an opportunity to integrate learning about the benefits of vaccination into the school curriculum including history and science

### The nasal flu vaccine

Children are offered a nasal spray (up the nose) as it is quick, painless, and more effective in the programme than an injected vaccine. This is because it is easier to administer and considered better at reducing the spread of flu to others.

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 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 will be offered an injected vaccine (either at school or through their GP practice). Parents who don't want their child to have the nasal spray because of the very small amounts of porcine gelatine (used as a stabiliser) can discuss the option of an injected vaccine with the school-aged immunisation service. All questions about suitability should be directed to the school-aged immunisation service.

If a child is unwell on the day, the team delivering the vaccines will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not.

There are [NHS leaflets](#) which provide more information for parents on the vaccine, including how it works and information on those children who are unable to have it.

### Further information

#### Timing of flu vaccination

As the flu virus can change each year, vaccination is required on an annual basis. The strains of virus used in flu vaccines change from one season to the next. Vaccinations are generally given in the autumn term before flu tends to circulate.

#### Who will give the vaccine to the children

The programme will be delivered by an NHS-commissioned school-aged immunisation service 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.

#### How parent or guardian consent will be obtained

A consent form and information leaflet provided by the school-aged immunisation service will be used to seek parental or guardian consent.

Only children for whom consent has been received will be vaccinated. Parents or guardians will also be provided with a contact number for the school-aged immunisation service 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 or guardians on behalf of the school-aged immunisation service, or it may be done electronically.

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

Schools have a key role to play in promoting uptake of the immunisation programme because of the relationship you have with parents and children. Please use all your communication channels to help promote uptake and share this guide with staff in your school.

#### GDPR and how information is shared

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) became UK law in 2018. No change is needed to the ways in which young people's personal information is used and shared by schools with the school-aged immunisation service for the purpose of providing vaccinations for this to be lawful under the UK data protection legislation.

#### How the school-aged immunisation service will identify the children to be vaccinated

The 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 in primary school.

#### Can parents or guardians refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes, the vaccination is not mandatory. Parents or guardians will be asked to give their informed consent for the vaccination.

#### 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 school-aged immunisation service will be able to share with the school.

#### If a child becomes unwell in school after receiving the vaccination

If the team is still on site, seek advice directly from them. If the team have left the site, manage the situation according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school and contact the school-aged immunisation service 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 an excellent 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 the virus 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 surgery or pharmacy.

See [flu vaccine on NHS.UK](#) for further information.

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