



Public Health  
England

**NHS**

# The facts about flu

**HELP US  
HELP YOU**

STAY WELL THIS WINTER

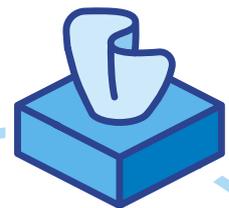
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Rachel Keith



**Flu is a common infectious viral illness spread by coughs and sneezes that affects the respiratory system. Flu – short for influenza – is especially common in winter, which is why it’s also known as “seasonal flu”.**

Because flu is caused by viruses and not bacteria, antibiotics won’t treat it. Flu is caused by a different virus than the common cold. A cold appears gradually and people are generally able to carry on with the rest of their day while feeling unwell. A bad bout of flu generally feels much worse and will make an individual feel unwell and too exhausted to carry on with their daily routine.

Flu can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death among vulnerable groups including older people, pregnant women and people with an underlying health condition.



**For otherwise healthy people flu can be very unpleasant, however most people will recover from flu within a week or two**

## THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT FLU IS TO GET THE FLU VACCINATION

### IT’S FREE FOR:

**65+**



**People with an underlying health condition**



**Health workers will be offered it by their employer**



**Children aged 2–9\***

Children in school years reception and years 1–5 receive the vaccine in school.

Children aged 2 and 3 years old can receive the vaccine at their GP surgery.

\*on 31 August 2018

**Pregnant women**



### Where can people get the flu vaccine?

**Their GP surgery**



**Adults can get the flu vaccine from a pharmacy offering the service**



**Children in school years reception and years 1–5 receive the vaccine in school**



**Some midwifery services**



**Health workers will be offered it by their employer**



## What are the first signs of flu?

Flu symptoms generally come on very quickly and can include:

- A sudden fever – a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- Dry, chesty cough
- Headache
- Tiredness or exhaustion
- Chills
- Aching body
- Diarrhoea or tummy pain
- Nausea or being sick
- Sneezing
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Limb or joint pain

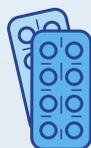


Those with an underlying health condition who think they have flu, should call **NHS 111**

Those with flu symptoms should avoid visiting GP surgeries and hospitals, where they may infect other more vulnerable people, and use community pharmacists as a first port of call for early symptoms

## How to treat flu?

If there are no underlying health conditions like asthma, liver disease, diabetes or heart disease, the easiest way for someone to treat flu symptoms is by:



### Taking paracetamol or ibuprofen

to lower temperature and treat aches and pains



### Drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration

(urine should be light yellow or clear)



### Resting and sleeping well



### Keeping warm

## How to prevent flu?

Having the flu vaccine is the best way to prevent catching flu and you should have it every year as the flu virus is always changing.

Good hand hygiene is also an important way to avoid catching flu and preventing its spread. We recommend people carry tissues and use them to catch coughs or sneezes, bin the used tissues as soon as possible and then wash their hands to kill the germs.



## Pregnant women and the flu vaccine

Pregnant women are advised to have the injectable flu vaccine, regardless of the stage of pregnancy. Pregnant women will benefit from the flu vaccine because:

- It reduces the risk of having a miscarriage, or the baby being born prematurely or with a low birthweight because of flu
- It reduces the chances of getting serious complications of flu, such as pneumonia, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy
- It will help protect the baby as they will have some immunity to flu in the first few months of their life



Like many other people who have asthma, my body tends to take longer to fight off infections. They generally have more of an effect on my lungs than other people I know, and mean that sometimes I need to be admitted to hospital. Last year I was pregnant as well, which made me even more aware that I needed to protect my baby as well as myself. I'll be getting the vaccine again this winter to help keep me and my family healthy.

**Alice Firth, 27,**  
Mother and asthma patient,  
from South London



Children are what we term 'super spreaders' so giving them the vaccine not only helps protect them, but also protects vulnerable people around them from becoming unwell

Parents should keep an eye out for the consent form from their child's school

## Needle-free vaccine for kids

Flu can be a horrible illness for young children but the good news is, children can receive the flu vaccine in the form of a simple nasal spray\* – so no need for needles!

Children aged 2-3 need to get the vaccine from their GP, while those in reception, and school years 1-5 can get the vaccine from their school.

\*Note: Not all children will be able to have the nasal spray as some children with certain health conditions will need to be given an injected vaccine.

## Are there any side effects to the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine cannot give people flu because it contains either a dead or weakened form of the virus.

Those having the injected vaccine may get a sore arm at the site of the injection, a slight temperature and aching muscles for a day or two after the vaccination - all can be managed by taking paracetamol.

Side effects of the nasal vaccine may include a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness and some loss of appetite.

**Serious side effects with either the nasal spray or injection are very uncommon.**