

Flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme

Winter 2023/24

Briefing pack for UKHSA stakeholders

This briefing pack provides information on the flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme for 2023/24. It aims to support stakeholders to explain and promote the vaccination programme to the public. It contains background information, statistics, key messages, suggested social media copy, social media assets and links to useful information.

The information provided is correct as of 11 October 2023.

Further information:

For further information about our national campaign and communications please contact: externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

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Flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme

The flu and COVID-19 vaccination programmes help to provide important protection to those eligible and their families over winter, preventing serious illness and death and helping to minimise hospitalisations during busy winter months.

Approximately 30 million people across the country will be offered a flu vaccine and 22 million a COVID-19 autumn booster this winter season.

This year's autumn flu and COVID-19 vaccine programmes have started earlier than planned in England. This is a precautionary measure following the identification of a new COVID-19 variant.

The precautionary measure was taken as scientists from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) examine the variant BA.2.86. The [technical briefings documents](#) on novel SARS-CoV-2 variants can be found on GOV.UK.

Advice from UKHSA suggests that speeding up the autumn vaccine programme will deliver greater protection, supporting those at greatest risk of severe illness and reducing the potential impact on the NHS.

How stakeholders can help us increase vaccine uptake

There are a variety of ways that you might be able to help us communicate the importance of eligible people taking up the offer of a vaccine this autumn.

- **Share information about the campaign with your networks** – we have a wide variety of resources available including leaflets and posters (many available in accessible and translated materials, social media assets and suggested copy for cascade to your audiences).
- **Contact us if you would like to do something more bespoke** – if you are looking to do something special to promote the vaccine programme on your social media channels or website and need some creative input or suggested text for a blog/article please email us
- **Get in touch about using our spokespeople** – if you are planning a webinar or briefing for your audiences and would like one of our senior colleagues to speak about the winter programme or campaign, please get in touch.
- **Help us find case studies** – We are looking for case studies of people (or their children) hospitalised by flu or COVID-19 and willing to share their experiences to encourage others to take up the vaccine offer(s). These could be for use in the press or on social media.

To discuss any of the above or any other suggestions you may have, please email externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

The winter season

Taking up both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines ahead of winter provides the best level of protection against severe illness and will help ease the pressure on the NHS this winter.

[Recent UKHSA modelling](#) shows last year's flu vaccinations prevented around 25,000 hospitalisations in England. Even with this success, the health impact of last year's flu season remained severe, with hospitalisations [and excess winter deaths from flu higher than those from COVID-19 at the peak of the 2022/23 season](#). Last year, the flu virus was estimated to be responsible for over 14,000 excess deaths and tens of thousands of hospitalisations, including over 10,000 (two thirds) in children. We have good evidence to suggest this year's vaccine will offer good protection.

Data from this year's [Southern Hemisphere winter season](#), where the H1N1 subtype was dominant, suggests the current flu vaccines are well matched against circulating strains, with the Australian Government officially recording its season as 'low' clinical severity.

It is possible the seasonal H1N1 virus could return to the UK where it has had limited circulation since 2019, after which measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic virtually eliminated the spread of all flu until the 22/23 season, when other subtypes re-emerged.

And as winter approaches, COVID-19 variants are also expected to be in circulation, increasing the risk to pregnant women, older people and those in vulnerable groups especially at risk of getting seriously ill.

It is therefore important that as many eligible people as possible have their flu and COVID-19 vaccines to build up their protection against severe illness before winter hits. We know that those who take up the offer of a vaccine are more likely to have milder symptoms and recover faster, cutting their risk of being hospitalised and reducing pressure on the NHS.

All eligible adults are urged to book their flu and COVID-19 vaccines online via the [NHS website](#), by downloading the NHS App, or by calling 119 for free if they can't get online, to give themselves the best protection against severe illness and hospitalisation.

Parents of children aged 2 and 3 (on 31 August) should book a nasal spray flu vaccine for their child at their local GP surgery.

The [schools programme](#) also began in early September, with those aged 4 up to the age of 16 (school year 11) being offered a nasal spray vaccine, or an injection if this is unsuitable.

It is important young people take up the vaccine as it protects the child themselves and helps stop the spread to vulnerable people around them, including babies, grandparents and people with weak immune systems.

Timeline of dates

NHS England leads on the operational rollout of the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations supported by advice and guidance for patients and the public from UKHSA. Healthcare leaders have been advised of the following dates:

- **11 September 2023:** Systems started vaccination for care home residents/staff and those who are housebound. NHS England is asking systems to ensure that all residents are vaccinated before 22 October 2023.
- **11 September 2023:** COVID-19 and flu vaccinations commenced for those eligible via Local Booking Systems (LBS), starting with those who are most at risk, including those who live with long-term conditions.
- **18 September 2023:** The National Booking System (NBS) opened to allow eligible people to book a COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccinations can be booked online (using NHS.uk), via the NHS App or by calling 119. National COVID-19 vaccination invitations also started being sent to eligible individuals from 18 September.
- **2 October 2023:** The NBS opened to those eligible to book their flu vaccine.
- **1 November 2023:** Annual marketing campaign begins (more information below).

For operational expediency and in line with public health recommendations – wherever possible, flu and COVID-19 vaccines will be administered by healthcare professionals at the same time. This aims to maximise uptake of both vaccines.

There is no change to flu vaccination for children. This began in early September as previously communicated.

Annual marketing campaign

The annual marketing campaign will begin on 1 November with brand new creatives, aimed specifically at engaging priority cohorts with lower vaccine take up rates and encouraging them to come forward for vaccination this year.

You will see a TV ad on streaming and on demand services, out of home advertising in regions with low vaccine take up and national radio advertising. There will additionally be advertorial content in all national and regional newspapers.

We will also have advertorial content in leading faith and community newspapers as well as TV stations where presenters will have pre-recorded content played out throughout the season to engage with black and minority ethnic groups specifically.

Digital content tailored to each of our priority cohorts will be placed in trusted spaces they access frequently, including videos and podcasts. We will be working with a number of carefully vetted and selected social influencers, who will produce a wide range of creative content supporting the campaign messages.

The marketing campaign will be launched with mainstream and consumer media, using the latest data on uptake and hospitalisations to drive people to book their vaccines.

Key messages

- Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter when we spend more time together indoors and can cause serious illness.
- Vaccinations are our best defence against flu and COVID-19. If you are vaccinated and catch flu or COVID-19 this winter, you are likely to have milder symptoms and recover faster, cutting your risk of being hospitalised.
- The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced that the winter vaccination programme has been brought forward by a few weeks as a precautionary measure, to deliver greater protection against the potential impact of BA.2.86 variant. We urge everyone eligible to take up the vaccine when offered.
- The winter vaccine programme will continue to focus on those at greatest risk of getting seriously ill.
- If you have certain underlying health conditions, are 65 years-old and over, or are pregnant you are eligible for both a flu and COVID-19 vaccine.
- Parents of children who are aged 2 or 3 on 31 August 2023 should contact their GP surgery to book their child's flu vaccination.
- School-aged children (from reception to Year 11) will mainly be offered their flu vaccinations at school.
- There will be further opportunities for children to get vaccinated in NHS community clinics (including for the home educated).
- For most children the vaccine is a nasal spray, not an injection. It is quick and painless.
- Vaccinations are offered to household contacts of immunocompromised individuals.
- You can check your eligibility and book online at <http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations>

Eligibility for COVID-19 booster vaccine

[JCVI's statement](#) on the autumn 2023 programme follows [interim advice](#) published in January.

The advice for this autumn is to offer the vaccine to those at high risk of serious disease and who are therefore most likely to benefit from vaccination.

Specifically, JCVI advises the following groups be offered a free COVID-19 booster vaccine this autumn:

- residents in a care home for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as laid out in the [Immunisation Green Book](#), COVID-19 chapter (Green Book). This includes pregnant women.
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts (as defined in the Green Book) of people with immunosuppression
- people aged 16 to 64 years who are carers (as defined in the Green Book - those who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those aged 16 years and over who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable) and staff working in care homes for older adults

Eligible individuals will be given a vaccine made by Pfizer, Sanofi or Moderna.

Eligibility for flu vaccine

Flu cohorts were confirmed in the [Annual Flu Letter](#).

Full list of those eligible for a free flu vaccine in the 2023 to 2024 season:

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged 6 months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (as defined by [the Green Book, chapter 19 \(influenza\)](#))
- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2023

- all primary school aged children (from reception to year 6)
- secondary school aged children (years 7 to 11)
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- certain carers (as defined in the Green Book - those who are in receipt of a carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill)
- household contacts of immunocompromised individuals
- frontline workers in a social care setting without an employer led occupational health scheme including those working for a registered residential care or nursing home, registered domiciliary care providers, voluntary managed hospice providers and those that are employed by those who receive direct payments (personal budgets) or personal health budgets, such as personal assistants

There are a range of flu vaccines available on the NHS. Eligible individuals will be offered one that is most appropriate for them.

Vaccination rates

COVID-19

- **General:** Data from last autumn's COVID-19 programme showed that those who received a booster were around 53% less likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19 in the 2 to 4 weeks following vaccination¹, compared to those who did not receive a booster.
- **Older people:** Last year's COVID-19 autumn booster programme ended on the 20 February 2023. Data up to 12 March² showed that 73.1% of people aged 65 to 70 years in England had been vaccinated and this increased in older cohorts rising to 83.8% (just under 2.5 million) in those aged over 80 years.
- **Pregnant women:** In the 26-month period between January 2021 and February 2023, a total of 1,134,487 women gave birth with linked records on vaccination status for 1,130,448 (99.6%) of them. Of women with linked records who gave birth over this period, 46.6% were known to have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine prior to giving birth, 40.5% received at least 2 doses, and 20.7% of women had received at least 3 doses. Through September 2022 to February 2023, 25.2% of women had not received a COVID-19 vaccine before they gave birth³.
- **People of black ethnicity:** The data to 12 March showed that people of Black or Black British – Caribbean background 54.8% had received at least two doses and 36.1% had received at least 3 doses. For people of Black or Black British – African background 63% had received at least 2 doses and 35.3% had received at least 3 doses. This compares to 89% (at least 2 doses) and 77.7% (at least 3 doses) of the White British population.
- **People of Asian ethnicity:** For people of Asian or Asian British – Indian background: 77.9% received at least 2 doses and 60.7% received at least 3 doses. Asian and Asian British – Pakistani: 73.1% for received least 2 doses and 35.8% received at least 3 does. Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi – 76.9% received at least 2 doses and 47.2% received at least 3 doses. Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background: 75.7 received at least 2 doses and 55.2% received at least 3 doses.

Flu

- **General:** Last season getting vaccinated for flu cut the risk of being hospitalised by flu by a quarter in adults aged 65 years and older, a third in

¹ Journal in The Lancet: [Duration of protection of ancestral-strain monovalent vaccines and effectiveness of bivalent BA.1 boosters against COVID-19 hospitalisation in England: a test-negative case-control study \(July 2023\)](#)

² [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance report](#): 16 March 2023 (week 11)

³ [COVID-19 vaccine surveillance report](#): 8 June 2023 (week 23)

other adults and reduces the risk two-thirds in children. This is on top of the collective protection we all get from the vaccines reducing flu transmission.

- **Older people:** The 2022 to 2023 winter season saw a flu vaccine uptake⁴ of 79.9% in those aged 65 years and over (compared with 82.3% in 2021 to 2022).
- **6 months to under 65s:** The vaccination rate was 49.1% for those aged 6 months to under 65 years of age with one or more underlying clinical risk factors (excluding pregnant women without other risk factors and carers), compared with 52.9% in 2021 to 2022
- **Pregnant women:** Vaccine uptake in pregnant women was 35.0%, compared with 37.9 % in 2021 to 2022.
- **Frontline healthcare workers:** In England, vaccine uptake among all frontline healthcare workers (trusts and GP practices) was 49.9%. In trusts, vaccine uptake was 49.4%, a decrease from 60.5% vaccine uptake in 2021 to 2022. In GP practices, vaccine uptake was 66.5%, a decrease from 74.1% vaccine uptake in 2021 to 2022.
- **2 and 3 year olds:** The combined uptake for 2 and 3 year olds was 43.7% compared with 50.1% in 2021 to 2022.
- **School aged children:** 51.9% (3,502,566 out of 6,747,523) of all school aged children in Reception to Year 9 combined were vaccinated, compared with 53.8% (917,109 out of 2,014,657) during the 2021 to 2022 season (this data reflects vaccinations in Reception to Year 9 which was published in the annual report for the first time).
- **Primary school aged children:** 56.3% (2,647,295 out of 4,705,474) of primary school aged children (Reception to Year 6) combined were vaccinated, compared with 57.4% (2,698,427 out of 4,701,000) during the 2021 to 2022 season.
- **Secondary school aged children:** 41.9% (855,271 out of 2,042,049) of secondary school aged children (Year 7 to Year 9) combined were vaccinated, compared with 45.5% (634,247 out of 1,344,804) during the 2021 to 2022 season.
- **People of black ethnicity (over 65s):** Only 48.5% adults over 65 from black/black British Caribbean background and 50.2% of Black or Black British - African got the flu vaccine last year (compared to 83.6% of the white British population)
- **People of black ethnicity (with long-term health conditions):** Only 28% of black/black British Caribbean adults with a long-term health condition and

⁴ [Seasonal influenza vaccine uptake data in GP patients](#): Winter season 2022 to 2023, Final data for 1 September 2022 to 28 February 2023

37% of Black/Black African adults got the flu vaccine last year compared to 54% of white British population.

- **People of black ethnicity (pregnant women):** Only 13% of black British Caribbean pregnant women and 27% of black British African pregnant women got the flu vaccine last year compared to 39.6 of pregnant white women.
- **People of Asian ethnicity (over 65s):** Asian or Asian British – Indian 72.2% Asian or Asian British – Pakistani 54.8%; Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi 67.7%; Asian or Asian British – Any other Asian background 68.3% (compared to 83.6% of the white British population)
- **People of Asian ethnicity (with long-term health conditions):** Asian or Asian British - Indian 49.8%; Asian or Asian British - Pakistani 34.2%; Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi 52.0%; Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background 49.6% (Compared to 54% of white British population)
- **People of Asian ethnicity (pregnant women):** Asian or Asian British - Indian 39.3%; Asian or Asian British - Pakistani 25.5%; Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi 34.6%; Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background 37.0% (compared to 39.6%) of pregnant white women.

Communication assets

We have produced some initial social media assets to support the flu and COVID-19 vaccines programme, encouraging those who are currently eligible for vaccination to come forward.

These resources are available on [Google Drive](#).

They include static assets, GIFs, web banners and poster artwork, alongside post copy and ALT text.

We will be producing further assets in the coming weeks, to support the launch of our national marketing campaign in early November. These will be added to the Google Drive link above as well as the [Campaign Resource Centre](#). We will notify you when they are available.

Examples of our social media and web content (full suite of resources on Google Drive/Campaign Resource Centre):

Social 1x1:

Target audience	Social media asset
General	 A yellow poster with the text 'GET WINTER STRONG' in large, bold, black and blue letters. The UK Health Security Agency logo is in the top left, and the NHS logo is in the top right. A woman wearing a hijab and glasses is on the right, flexing her arm. A blue circular button on the right says 'Get vaccinated'. Below the main text is a box containing text about the benefits of getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19.
	 A yellow poster with the text 'GET WINTER STRONG' in large, bold, black and blue letters. The UK Health Security Agency logo is in the top left, and the NHS logo is in the top right. A woman with short dark hair is on the right, flexing her arm. A blue circular button on the right says 'Get vaccinated'. Below the main text is a box containing text about the benefits of getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19.



Pregnant women (flu and COVID-19)





Parents (flu)





People with long term health conditions (flu and COVID-19)





Suggested social media copy (including carousel/animated GIFs)

Copy	Image	Alt text
<p>Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter and can cause serious harm to those more vulnerable. </p> <p>Get winter strong – check if you're eligible and book your vaccination now. </p> <p>More info: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>		<p>GIF. Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter and can cause you serious harm. But flu and COVID-19 vaccines can keep you protected and better able to defend yourself. So, if you do run into these viruses this winter, you'll have milder symptoms, recover quicker and be less likely to end up in hospital. Get vaccinated. Get winter strong. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>
<p>It's time to get winter strong </p> <p>Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder & you'll recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter. </p> <p>More info: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>		<p>GIF. Get winter strong. Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder and you will recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>
<p>If you're pregnant, it's important to get your vaccinations against flu and COVID-19. These viruses spread more easily in winter & can cause serious harm. </p> <p>Book now or via the NHS App: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>		<p>GIF. Get winter strong. Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter and can cause serious harm to your baby. If you're pregnant, book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>



As we head into the colder months, remember that COVID-19 and flu can be especially dangerous for those at higher risk of severe illness. 😷 😷

Find out if you're eligible and book your vaccination now. July 17

nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App



It's time to get winter strong



Getting your vaccines if you're eligible means your symptoms will be milder & you'll recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter.

nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App



Get ready for winter and come forward for your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations if you're eligible.

GIF. Get winter strong. Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder and you will recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations

GIF. Get winter strong. Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder and you will recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations

GIF. Get winter strong. Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder and you will recover faster if

<p>These vaccines will help protect you against serious illness.</p> <p>More info: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App</p>		<p>you run into these viruses this winter. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>
<p>Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself, those around you and the NHS in the colder months, when #flu and #COVID19 can spread more easily.</p> <p>Let's #GetWinterStrong</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book at: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App</p>		<p>Get winter strong. Getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines means your symptoms will be milder and you will recover faster if you run into these viruses this winter. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>
<p>It's time to #GetWinterStrong 💪</p> <p>Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce your risk of serious illness if you have an underlying health condition.</p> <p>Book now at: nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App</p>		<p>Get winter strong. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce your risk of serious illness if you have an underlying health condition. Check your eligibility and book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>
<p>The nasal spray flu vaccine is quick, easy and helps protect children against serious illness this winter.</p> <p>Let's #GetWinterStrong</p>		<p>Get winter strong. Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter and can hit children hard. Help them to defend themselves with a quick and easy</p>

<p>If your child is aged 2 or 3, contact your GP practice to book their vaccine.</p>		<p>nasal vaccine spray. If you have a child aged 2 or 3 contact your GP practice to book their vaccine.</p>
<p>#GetWinterStrong and help protect you and your baby from serious illness with the flu and COVID-19 vaccines.</p> <p>If you're pregnant, book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS App</p>		<p>Get winter strong. Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter and can cause serious harm to your baby. If you're pregnant, book now at nhs.uk/wintervaccinations</p>

Posters:

We have a variety of posters available which organisations can print and display to raise awareness of the campaign.

This includes editable versions. These have been created to allow stakeholders to co-badge the campaign by adding your own logo, call to action and/or contact details.

Examples of our posters are below:



Web banners:

We have a variety of web banners available in both 800px x 300px and 2375px x 562px format.



Blogs

We have published a series of public-facing blogs providing further information about flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory infections:

- UKSHA blog: [Get Winter Strong: revisiting respiratory infection guidance for a safer season](#)
- UKHSA blog: [Get Winter Strong: why having a flu vaccination matters](#)
- UKHSA blog: [5 reasons to vaccinate your under-5s against flu](#)
- UKHSA blog: [Should we be worried about the new COVID-19 variant?](#)

Case studies

We are looking for case studies of people (or their children) hospitalised by flu or COVID-19 and willing to share their experiences to encourage others to take up the vaccine offer(s). These could be for use in the press or on social media. If you think you or someone in your network might be willing to help please email ukhsa-pressoffice@ukhsa.gov.uk

Further information

Most children are offered a nasal spray vaccine which is quick and easy to administer and offers the best protection for children. A small number of children cannot have the nasal spray because of medical conditions or treatments, or a religious faith that does not permit products containing pork gelatine. They can be offered protection through an injected vaccine instead.

Flu and COVID-19 resources

Paper copies of many flu and COVID-19 resources are available to order for free (please register/login using your work email address) at www.healthpublications.gov.uk

A number of our key public-facing publications are available in community languages including: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), Estonian, Farsi, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Panjabi, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romany, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Yiddish and Yoruba.

Many are also available in braille, British sign language video, audio and large print versions.

Flu: Useful links

- [Tripartite annual flu letter 2023 to 2024](#)
- [Green Book: Influenza Chapter](#)
- [Flu vaccine uptake data](#)
- [Flu surveillance reports](#)
- [Timing of flu seasons](#)

Flu: Guidance and resources

- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: information for practitioners working in early years settings](#)
- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: Leaflets for social care staff and providers](#)
- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: guidance and resources for schools](#)
- [Protecting your child against flu: information for parents and carers](#) (Copies of this leaflet are available in braille, BSL video, audio, large print, and in 30 community languages)
- [Protect yourself from flu: information for secondary school aged children](#) (Copies of this leaflet are available in braille, BSL, video, audio, and over 30 languages)
- [Flu: 5 reasons to vaccinate your child poster](#) (0-11 years - available in 26 translated languages)
- [Flu: 5 reasons to have the vaccine](#) (11-17 years – available in 26 translated languages)
- [Flu vaccination: who should have it and why](#)
- [Flu vaccination: Easy read leaflet for those with a learning disability](#)
- [Flu vaccination: Easy read poster for those with a learning disability](#)
- [Flu vaccination: Simple text leaflet for adults with low literacy levels](#)
- [Flu vaccination: Simple text leaflet for children with low literacy levels](#)

- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: information for healthcare practitioners](#)
- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: training recommendations and training slide set](#)
- [Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024: e-learning programme](#)



The flu vaccination
Who should have it and why

WINTER 2023 TO 2024

Includes information for parents and pregnant women

Flu Immunisation
Helping to protect people, every winter




flu: 5 reasons

to vaccinate your child



- 1. Protect your child**
The vaccine will help protect your child against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia
- 2. Protect you, your family and friends**
Vaccinating your child will help protect more vulnerable friends and family
- 3. No injection needed**
The nasal spray is painless and easy to have
- 4. It's better than having flu**
The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record
- 5. Avoid costs**
If your child gets flu, you may have to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare

For more information visit www.nhs.uk/child-flu

NHS

COVID-19: useful links

- [Green book: COVID-19 chapter](#)
- [Coronavirus dashboard](#)
- [COVID-19 variants identified in the UK – latest updates](#)
- [Monitoring reports of the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination](#)

[COVID-19: Guidance and resources](#)

Paper copies of many flu and COVID resources are available to order for free (please register/login using your work email address) at www.healthpublications.gov.uk

- All resources can be found here: [COVID-19 vaccination programme](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination: autumn programme resources](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination training slide set](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination e-learning programme](#)



Press releases

- [UKHSA winter briefing](#) (UKHSA press release, 2 October 2023)
- [Annual children's flu vaccination programme gets underway](#) (UKHSA press release, 8 September 2023)
- [Flu and COVID autumn vaccine programmes brought forward](#) (UKHSA and DHSC press release, 30 August 2023)
- [JCVI advises on eligible groups for 2023 autumn booster](#) (UKHSA press release on behalf of JCVI Secretariat)
- [All secondary school pupils eligible for free flu vaccine](#) (UKHSA, DHSC, NHSE, DfE press release, 4 July 2023)

Guidance for practitioners

[Guidance on the 2023/24 flu programme](#) is available on our website. This includes information on who should have the vaccine this winter and why, guidance for healthcare practitioners, and immunisation training recommendations.

We have produced [resources to support healthcare professionals with the vaccination programme](#). This includes a leaflet providing a guide to the programme

(also available as translated and accessible versions) and 'I have had my autumn COVID-19 vaccination' stickers. These are all available to download and/or order for free.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccine Q&A

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Flu vaccination

Who is most at risk?

People in older age groups, children 2 to 3 years old, pregnant women and those with certain health conditions are most at risk of getting seriously ill with flu. But the good news is they can help protect themselves by getting the flu vaccine.

Who is eligible?

If you're vulnerable to flu you should take advantage of the vaccine to keep yourself well and winter strong.

The following groups are eligible for a free flu vaccine:

- All adults aged 65 and over
- Anyone under 65 with certain health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, some neurological diseases, liver disease or a weakened immune system (for instance due to being prescribed steroids or treated for cancer)
- All pregnant women
- Children aged 2 to 3 years on 31 August 2023
- All primary school children and secondary school aged children in years 7 to 11
- Those living in care homes

- Certain carers (as defined in the Green Book - those who are in receipt of a carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill)
- Frontline workers in a social care setting without an employer led occupational health scheme including those working for a registered residential care or nursing home, registered domiciliary care providers, voluntary managed hospice providers and those that are employed by those who receive direct payments (personal budgets) or personal health budgets, such as personal assistants

[Find eligibility details on the NHS website.](#)

Does the vaccine actually help?

Last winter, getting vaccinated against flu cut the risk of being hospitalised by around:

- 66 per cent in children
- 25 per cent in adults aged 65 years and older
- 33 per cent in other adults with underlying health conditions

When can I book?

The National Booking system for flu vaccine goes live on Monday 2 October but some GP practices are already inviting people to attend. The vaccines are delivered in the autumn to provide protection before infection rates rise. Most eligible adults can get their flu vaccine at their GP practice or a local pharmacy now.

Even if you were vaccinated last year, it is important to get your jab again this flu season because the viruses can change year to year and protection decreases over time.

The best defence is to get your vaccine before the virus starts circulating. If you're eligible, please take advantage of this preventative measure to keep yourself well and winter strong.

I got the vaccine last year, is there a need to be vaccinated this year?

If you had the flu vaccination last year, you need another one this year. The flu viruses can change from one winter to the next. Flu vaccines are updated for each winter to give protection against the strains of flu that are most likely to be going around. For this reason, we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

Children's flu programme

Do school children get offered the flu vaccine?

Yes. Around 8 million children in reception to year 11 will be offered the free nasal spray flu vaccine, delivered in schools by immunisation teams up and down the country.

How do pre-schoolers get the vaccine?

Children aged 2 and 3 years (on or before 31 August) are eligible for the free nasal spray via their GP practice.

Can flu harm children?

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children, and for some, flu can lead to hospitalisation, and even death in rare cases.

Last winter, over 10,000 children were hospitalised due to flu, and many of these could have been prevented by getting the vaccine.

Children are offered the vaccine in the form of a quick and painless nasal spray vaccine, so it couldn't be easier.

Most children get it through their school, so parents should make sure to sign and return the consent form. For pre-schoolers, parents will be invited to bring their child forward in the coming weeks, or alternatively you can contact your GP practice to make an appointment.

Does the vaccine protect children against flu?

As well as helping to give children protection against flu, the vaccine also helps stop them passing it to others like elderly relatives such as grandparents, who will be more vulnerable.

Because so many infections can be passed on in school, high vaccination uptake among children can also help prevent the spread of infection in the wider community.

After vaccination, some kids may get mild side effects like a runny nose, but the vaccine cannot actually give them flu.

How does the nasal spray work?

The nasal spray contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity. This means your child will be better able to fight off flu.

The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

Are there any side-effects of the nasal spray?

Children may develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness, and some loss of appetite. However, these are much milder than developing flu or complications associated with flu. Serious side-effects are uncommon.

Can the vaccine cause flu?

No, the vaccine cannot cause flu because the viruses in it have been weakened to prevent this from happening.

Can the vaccine lead to increased risk of invasive group A strep?

No. In fact [our evidence suggests it may help reduce the rate of group A strep infections.](#)

What if my child has a health condition?

Children with certain health conditions, even if well managed, are at higher risk of severe complications if they get flu. It is especially important that these children are vaccinated.

These conditions include:

- serious lung problems, for example, asthma needing regular inhaled or oral steroids
- serious heart conditions
- kidney or liver disease
- diabetes
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, for example, chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer or long term steroid use
- problems with the spleen, either because the spleen has been removed (asplenia) or doesn't work properly, for example, because of sickle cell or coeliac disease
- our GP may also recommend that your child is vaccinated if they have a condition that affects the nervous system such as cerebral palsy

These children should have a flu vaccination every year from the age of six months onwards. Most will have the nasal spray vaccine, but it is not recommended for children under the age of 2 years.

Children under 2, and those for whom the nasal spray is not suitable for medical reasons, will be offered a flu vaccine injection.

If you are not sure whether your child needs a flu vaccination or you need more advice, speak to your practice nurse, GP or health visitor.

Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatine derived from pigs (porcine gelatine)?

Yes. The nasal vaccine contains traces of a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the weakened vaccine viruses stable, so the vaccine is able to work properly. The nasal vaccine is easy to give and painless. Each child who has the nasal spray vaccine gets the best protection against flu. It is also considered to be the best at reducing the spread of flu. That way children protect one another and others who might be vulnerable to flu. For those who may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products, an injected flu vaccine is available as an alternative. You should discuss your options with your nurse, doctor, or school aged immunisation team.

Flu and pregnancy

Should pregnant women have a flu vaccination?

All pregnant women are encouraged to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their unborn babies. Being pregnant changes how your body fights infections like flu and catching it while pregnant increases your risk and your baby's risk of complications which may result in a stay in intensive care, or even death.

The [flu vaccine can be given safely to expectant mothers at any stage of pregnancy](#), even right from the start. You can speak to your GP practice, pharmacist or midwife now about booking a flu jab appointment.

Flu and long term health conditions

What about those with underlying health conditions?

Individuals with certain underlying health conditions are eligible for a free flu vaccine. Conditions that would make someone eligible include those with:

- Heart or liver disease
- Chronic respiratory disease
- Diabetes
- Immunosuppression (weakened immune system)
- Some neurological conditions (like Parkinson's, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy)

A [full list of who is eligible](#) is available on the NHS website.

COVID-19

Why have you brought the start date forward for the vaccination campaign?

This year's autumn flu and COVID-19 vaccine programmes will start earlier than planned in England as a precautionary measure following the identification of a new COVID-19 variant. Advice from UKHSA suggests that speeding up the autumn vaccine programme will deliver greater protection, supporting those at greatest risk of severe illness and reducing the potential impact on the NHS.

Will the vaccine protect me against the new BA.2.86 strain I've read about?

It's too early to know that right now. But what we do know is that the vaccines provide good protection against hospitalisation and death against many of the other circulating strains of COVID and are expected to work against this new one too. Early data about the variant is encouraging. If you are eligible, get booked in for your vaccine as soon as possible.

Who is eligible for COVID-19 vaccination

Thanks to the success of our vaccine programme, we have built a strong, broad immune defences against COVID-19 throughout the population. However, some people remain more vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19, and vaccination will provide the best protection against severe infection this winter.

Those eligible for an autumn COVID-19 vaccine are:

- residents in a care home for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over

- people aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as laid out in the [Immunisation Green Book](#), COVID-19 chapter
- frontline health and social care workers
- people aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts (as defined in the Green Book) of people with immunosuppression
- people aged 16 to 64 years who are carers (as defined in the Green Book - those who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those aged 16 years and over who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable) and staff working in care homes for older adults.

All the vaccines advised for the 2023 autumn booster campaign are expected to be effective at preventing serious illness and hospitalisation from COVID-19. If you are offered a booster vaccination, or any other COVID-19 or Flu vaccinations, please accept the offer as soon as you are able to. It is important to have your vaccine to build up your protection against severe illness before the winter.

Should pregnant women get the COVID-19 vaccine?

All pregnant women are defined as part of a clinical risk group and are encouraged to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their unborn babies. Being pregnant changes how your body fights infections like COVID-19 and catching it while pregnant increases your risk and your baby's risk of complications which may result in hospitalisation.

The COVID-19 vaccine [can be given safely to expectant mothers at any stage of pregnancy](#), even right from the start.

Why have people aged 50 to 65 not been included this year?

The vaccination programme focuses on those at greatest risk of severe COVID-19 infection – people aged 65 and over, and those with underlying health conditions that make them more vulnerable. Previous COVID-19F booster programmes offered vaccination to a larger group of people as part of the pandemic emergency response. The success of these programmes has enabled us to live with Covid and, this year, based on JCVI advice we are able to scale back the number of people who require an autumn booster.

Can you get a COVID-19 booster privately?

The COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to target those at higher risk of serious illness in line with JCVI advice, as those groups are most likely to benefit from booster vaccination at this time.

The COVID-19 vaccine is not currently available to buy privately in the UK but there is no blanket restriction on private sales of licensed vaccines. UKHSA will continue to work with manufacturers to ensure there is sufficient vaccine supply available to the NHS programme.

I've heard that the COVID-19 vaccine given may change?

All COVID-19 vaccinations offered by the NHS have been advised for use this autumn/winter by the experts in the Joint Committee for Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI). The vaccines have all been tested in line with rigorous standards and have been found to give good protection against the virus.

The booster programme enables those at highest risk to top up their immunity against COVID-19 ahead of winter. Everyone eligible will be offered one dose and individuals should take it up as early as possible, irrespective of which booster vaccine is offered.

Can I choose which vaccine I have?

COVID-19 vaccines authorised for use by the NHS are effective, provide a strong booster response and have good safety record. Usually, you cannot choose which vaccine you have. They have all met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness. The only exception is for people who, for reasons of faith or ethical dietary considerations, are unable to have certain vaccine types. Alternatives will be made available where clinically appropriate.

Will I need the same type of COVID-19 vaccine as I had before?

No, all COVID-19 vaccines authorised for use by the NHS are effective and provide a strong booster response. When you attend your appointment, the NHS will offer you an appropriate and effective vaccine with a proven safety record.

Can you still catch COVID-19 after having the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine will reduce the chance of you becoming severely unwell from COVID-19 this winter. It may take a few days for your body to build up some extra protection from the vaccine. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but any infection should be less severe.

For further information, please contact:

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