

FAQs Flu campaign

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Please feel to use these as guides for scripts for films and in responses to queries on social media. We will be updating these to reflect questions asked by people on our social media channels over the coming weeks.

Will I get side effects from the flu vaccine?

All vaccines are thoroughly tested to make sure they will not harm you or your child. Serious side effects of the flu vaccine are very rare, and flu vaccines have a good safety record. You may have a mild fever and aching muscles for a couple of days after having the vaccine, and your arm may be a bit sore where you were injected. The nasal spray flu vaccine has few side effects, most commonly getting a runny nose after the vaccination for a few days.

Will the vaccine stop me getting flu, how effective is it?

Studies have shown that the flu vaccine will help prevent you getting the flu and becoming seriously ill with it. It will not stop all flu viruses and the level of protection may vary, so it's not a 100% guarantee that you'll be flu-free. But if you do get flu after vaccination it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been. Typically, effectiveness of flu vaccine is in the range of 30-60 per cent.

Doesn't the vaccine give you flu and make you feel poorly?

No. The flu vaccination does not give you flu. Some people may have mild fever and aching muscles for a couple of days after having the vaccine and your arm may be a bit sore where you were injected but this is not flu. It may be that you have caught a flu-like virus that's not really flu, or you may have caught flu before your flu vaccination had taken effect. That's usually about 10 to 14 days after vaccination.

I'm pregnant - is it safe for me and baby to have the flu vaccine? Can I have the vaccine if I am breastfeeding?

Yes, it is safe. Studies have shown that it's safe to have the flu vaccine during any stage of pregnancy, from the first few weeks up to your expected due date. Women who have had the flu vaccine while pregnant also pass some protection on to their

babies, which lasts for the first few months of their lives. It's also safe for women who are breastfeeding to have the vaccine.

Can children have the flu vaccine?

Yes and children are offered the vaccine as nasal spray so it is pain free and very quick. It is free for all children with a health condition up to 18 years old, those aged 2 and 3 years old and all primary school and secondary school children up to year 11.

Is flu really that serious for children? Is it worth having the vaccine?

It can be a serious illness that leads to complications like bronchitis and pneumonia, and painful ear infection in children. But flu also spreads easily so by vaccinating children you are also stopping the spread to your families and the wider community. Not only that but it could mean more time off school for children and after the last 18 months that is important for them too.

Can I have the still have the COVID-19 vaccine, if I have a flu vaccine?

Yes. Protecting yourself against both is really important. It is perfectly safe to have flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time.

Public Health England advises that there are no safety concerns and that the flu vaccine can be given at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine. This including the nasal flu vaccine that children receive. It is standard practice for different vaccines to be given at the same time as each other. This happens frequently with routine childhood vaccinations in the UK and other countries as well as with adult vaccination.

What's the COVID-19 booster?

The COVID-19 booster programme is the rollout of an additional dose of the vaccine to people who have previously received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to ensure continued protection for those most at risk from the virus. The booster is given six months after the second dose.

Why is the COVID-19 booster programme needed?

We want to provide people that are most likely to become seriously ill from COVID-19 and those who care for them with the best possible protection for this winter.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has reviewed available data and provided advice that COVID-19 boosters are first offered to the most vulnerable in order to provide maximum protection during the winter months.

We would also encourage people that are eligible for a flu vaccination to also get their COVID-19 booster at the same time, if it is offered.

Who is eligible for the COVID-19 booster vaccine?

Independent experts, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), have said that people who received a vaccination in Phase 1 of the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be offered a third dose (a COVID-19 booster) vaccine. These are:

- those living in residential care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 50 years or over
- frontline health and social care workers
- all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 (as set out in the green book), and adult carers
- adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals

The JCVI advises that the booster vaccine dose should be offered no earlier than six months after completion of the first course of vaccination.

Will I get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as my flu vaccine?

You might be offered both at the same time. If you are not, wait for your COVID-19 vaccination invitation, and book as soon as you get it. It's safe to have both vaccines at the same time.

Does the flu vaccine protect you against COVID-19?

No. Having a flu jab will not protect you against COVID-19. The flu vaccine is designed to prevent infections from influenza viruses. COVID-19 is a different virus. It's never too late to get your COVID-19 vaccine. If you haven't already, please take up the offer - it will offer you the best protection against the virus. You can find out more by visiting www.nhs.uk

Is the flu vaccine free?

Yes, the vaccine is free to people who are at increased risk from the effects of flu. You can get a free flu vaccine if you are

- aged 50 and over
- pregnant
- a carer
- you have certain medical conditions, and this applies to anyone from the age of 6 months

Children aged 2-3 years, all primary aged school children, and young people at secondary school up to year 11 can also get the free vaccine. If you are not in these groups you can choose to have the vaccination but you have to pay for it, and this service is usually provided by your local pharmacy.