

2021 edition

Flu vaccine



NHS
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What is flu?



- Influenza (flu) is an infectious virus and can be serious.
- The flu virus spreads through the air when people cough or sneeze, or by touching surfaces where it has landed then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Even healthy people can become seriously ill from flu.
- Flu can lead to complications that may result in hospitalisation or even death.
- Every year in Scotland people are hospitalised with flu, and this winter our immunity may be lower than usual.

Flu symptoms

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C or above
- muscle aches and pains
- feeling tired or exhausted
- a cough
- a headache
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- feeling sick and being sick.

How safe and effective is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine, and gives the best protection against flu. It's offered every year for free by the NHS to help protect people at risk of flu and its complications.

Flu vaccines help protect against the main types of flu viruses, although there's still a chance you might get flu after having the vaccine. If you do get flu after vaccination, it's likely to be milder and not last as long.

Having the flu vaccine will also stop you spreading flu to other people who may be more at risk of serious problems from flu.

How does the flu vaccine work?

The flu vaccine works by teaching your body's immune system how to protect itself from the disease.

The flu vaccine does not contain any live flu viruses and cannot give you flu.

You have to be immunised every year because the virus changes each year and your immunity reduces over time.

How is the vaccine given?

The flu vaccine will be given as an injection in the upper arm.

You only need one dose of the flu vaccine. Flu vaccinations begin in September. It takes around 10 days for the vaccine to work, so the sooner you get it the better.

NHS Scotland will make sure the vaccine is given safely. Strict infection prevention and control measures will be in place.

Who will be offered the flu vaccine?

Scotland's Chief Medical Officer recommends you have the free flu vaccine this year if you:

- are aged 50 or over (or will be by 31 March 2022)
- have an eligible health condition
- work in health or social care (including independent NHS contractors)
- are an unpaid or young carer
- are a nursery, primary or secondary school teacher or pupil-facing support staff in a Local Authority or independent setting
- work as a prison officer or support staff who delivers direct front-facing detention services
- are pregnant.

NHS Scotland recommends you get the vaccine as soon as it is offered to you.

Eligible health conditions

People with certain health conditions are more at risk of flu-related complications and need extra protection, even if they feel healthy and their health condition is mild or well-managed.

Conditions and diseases which can make flu more dangerous include:

- asthma
- bronchitis
- emphysema
- cystic fibrosis
- chronic heart disease
- chronic kidney failure
- multiple sclerosis
- liver problems
- diabetes
- asplenia (dysfunction of the spleen)
- being very overweight
- HIV infection
- stroke
- undergoing chemotherapy treatment
- taking medication that reduces immunity.

What are the side effects?



headache



muscle aches



sore arm

The flu vaccine is safe and effective but, like all medicines, can cause side effects.

It's normal to experience side effects after the vaccine. It shows the vaccine is teaching your body's immune system how to protect itself from the disease, however, not everyone gets them. Side effects are usually mild and may include:

- tenderness, swelling and/or redness at the injection site
- headache
- muscle aches
- fever (temperature of 38°C or above)
- feeling generally unwell.

These common side effects are much less serious than developing flu or complications associated with flu, and they usually go away within a few days.

For more information on vaccine ingredients, and links to the manufacturer's information leaflets, visit www.nhsinform.scot/flu or call 0800 030 8013.

Fever after the vaccine and COVID-19 symptoms

It's quite common to develop a fever (temperature of 38°C or above) after a vaccination. This normally happens within 48 hours of the vaccination and usually goes away within 48 hours.

You do not need to self-isolate or book a COVID-19 test unless you have other COVID-19 symptoms or if you have been advised to by:

- NHS Test and Protect
- your Occupational Health team
- a Public Health Protection team

If the fever starts more than 48 hours after the vaccination or lasts longer than 48 hours, you should self-isolate and book a COVID-19 test. This can be done at **www.nhsinform.scot/testing**

For information about the latest advice visit **www.nhsinform.scot/covid19** or call **0800 030 8013**.

Reporting side effects

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme at www.yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk

This information is a guide only. Always get medical advice from NHS24 free on 111 if you're worried about your health.

Are there any reasons you should not get the vaccine?

Most adults can have the flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs.

It's important that you tell the person giving you your vaccine if you have an egg allergy or if you've ever had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine.

How to get the flu vaccine

NHS Scotland will let you know when to get your flu vaccine. You'll be invited to get the vaccine from September onwards, so you're protected before flu viruses start to circulate, which is usually in winter.

For more information about the flu vaccine visit www.nhsinform.scot/flu or call 0800 030 8013 (open 8am–8pm 7 days a week).



Translations



Easy read



BSL



Audio



Large print



Braille

For more information, including other formats and translation support:



www.nhsinform.scot/flu



0800 030 8013



phs.otherformats@phs.scot

Information correct at time of publication.
Please visit **www.nhsinform.scot/flu** for the most up-to-date information.

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www.nhsinform.scot/confidentiality

www.nhsinform.scot/data-protection

www.informationgovernance.scot.nhs.uk/use-of-your-immunisation-data

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