

2021 edition

# Flu vaccine during pregnancy



# 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 when they touch surfaces where it has landed then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Every year, pregnant women become seriously unwell with flu. Some of these women need to go into hospital and have intensive care treatment.
- Those with a health condition such as diabetes or asthma are particularly vulnerable.
- Flu can lead to complications such as early labour, low birth weight and stillbirth.

## 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.

## The flu vaccine in pregnancy

**The flu vaccine is the safest and most effective way to protect you and your unborn baby from flu.**

The Royal College of Midwives recommends pregnant women get the free flu vaccine every time they're pregnant. This is because the flu viruses circulating change each year and your immunity reduces over time. This winter our immunity may be lower than usual.

The vaccine helps protect you and your developing baby against flu during your pregnancy and for at least three months after birth. You can get the vaccine at any stage of pregnancy.

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 vaccine protects you and your baby against flu. It contains no live viruses and cannot give you flu.

## How is the flu 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.**

# 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](http://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](https://www.nhsinform.scot/testing)**

### Reporting side effects

**You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme at [www.yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk](https://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 flu 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 (an egg-free vaccine may be available) or if you've ever had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine.

## How to get the flu vaccine

Speak to your midwife about getting your flu vaccine. Flu vaccinations begin 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).

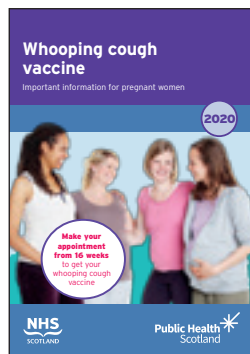


## Other vaccines during pregnancy

### Whooping cough vaccine

Pregnant women are strongly advised to get the whooping cough vaccine. This will protect you and your baby against whooping cough. You can have the whooping cough vaccine between 16 and 32 weeks. It's best to have the vaccine as soon as you can after week 16 of your pregnancy.

You can get the flu vaccine at the same time as the whooping cough vaccine, but do not delay either vaccine to have both at the same time.



### COVID-19 vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine is recommended in pregnancy. Vaccination is the best way to protect against the known risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy for both women and babies. These include the admission of pregnant women into intensive care and the premature birth of the baby. You and your unborn baby cannot catch COVID-19 from the vaccine.



For more information about vaccinations during pregnancy visit  
[www.nhsinform.scot/pregnancyandbabyvaccines](https://www.nhsinform.scot/pregnancyandbabyvaccines)



Translations



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For more information, including other formats and translation support:



**[www.nhsinform.scot/flu](http://www.nhsinform.scot/flu)**



**0800 030 8013**



**[phs.otherformats@phs.scot](mailto:phs.otherformats@phs.scot)**

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