




UK Health  
Security  
Agency



# Winter Vaccinations 2025/26

## Communications toolkit for stakeholders



**Who is eligible for the flu vaccine this year?**

**From 1 September 2025:**

- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2025
- Children with certain long-term health conditions (aged 6 months to less than 18 years)
- primary school aged children (from reception to Year 6)
- secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)
- all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to under 18 years

**From 1 October 2025 :**

- everyone aged 65 years and over
- individuals aged 18 to under 65 with certain long-term health conditions
- care home residents
- carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- those living with people who are immunocompromised
- frontline health and social care workers

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# Introduction

Each winter, the National Health Service experiences increased pressure due to the circulation of seasonal viruses that can make people very unwell.

This winter, there is potential for infectious diseases such as respiratory infections and norovirus to circulate at the same time. The vaccination programmes are critical in supporting NHS and adult social care resilience through the winter months when hospital admissions are at their peak, demand on adult social care is high, and GP practices see an increased number of patients.

This toolkit provides some initial resources on communicating effective health messages throughout winter 2025/26.

It has been designed to support stakeholders in promoting winter vaccines, and behaviours that will prevent the spread of infection.

It contains background information, statistics, key messages, FAQs and links to useful information. We will publish further versions of this toolkit which will include social media assets and links to health publications.

It is aimed at communications professionals working in the NHS, local government, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and the voluntary and community sector, health professionals who engage in public-facing vaccine communications as part of their role, public health teams involved in local and/or regional vaccine promotion, and others responsible for developing or delivering vaccine uptake messages.

It has been produced jointly by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England.

## Further information

For further information about our national campaign and communications please contact: [externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk](mailto:externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk) (UKHSA) or [england.vaccinations-screening-communications@nhs.net](mailto:england.vaccinations-screening-communications@nhs.net) (NHS England)

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# How stakeholders can help us communicate health messages this winter

There are a variety of ways that you might be able to help us communicate clear, consistent and accessible health messages this winter:

- **Share information in this toolkit with your networks** – we have a wide variety of resources available including social media assets, leaflets and posters (many available in accessible and translated materials) for cascade to your audiences.
- **Contact us if you would like to do something more bespoke** – if you are looking for our help to deliver some targeted communications 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 colleagues to speak about winter vaccines or winter preparedness/response, please get in touch.
- **Help us find case studies** – We are looking for case studies of people (or their children) who have been hospitalised by flu or another vaccine preventable disease, and willing to share their experiences to encourage others to take up the vaccine offer. These could be for use in the national or regional press and/or on social media.

To discuss any of the above or any other suggestions you may have, please email [externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk](mailto:externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk)

# Winter vaccines

This winter, several vaccines are being offered to protect people against seasonal respiratory illnesses. Here's an overview of the vaccines available and the eligibility for each:

## Flu

The flu vaccine helps protect against influenza (flu).

Flu is not just a heavy cold. Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter, which is why it's sometimes called seasonal flu. It's a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat. A bad bout of flu can be much worse than a heavy cold.

The most common symptoms of flu are fever, chills, headache, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness. Healthy individuals usually recover within 2 to 7 days, but for some the disease can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

Flu vaccines help protect against the main types of flu virus circulating.

## Flu vaccine eligibility

Flu vaccination cohorts were confirmed in the [national flu immunisation programme 2025 to 2026 letter](#).

Eligibility for flu vaccination is based on the advice and recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The following groups are eligible to receive a flu vaccination:

From 1 September 2025:

- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2025
- primary school aged children (from Reception to Year 6)
- secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)
- all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years

From 1 October 2025:

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged 18 years to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (as defined by the [Green Book, Influenza chapter 19](#))
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- close 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

All frontline health care workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff who have contact with patients, should be offered the flu vaccine from 1 October as a vital part of their organisation's policy for the prevention of the transmission of flu.

Social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to flu should also have the flu vaccine provided by their employer. There are circumstances where frontline staff, employed by specific social care providers without access to employer led occupational health schemes (see [cohort eligibility](#) above), can access the vaccine through the NHS free of charge.

## COVID-19

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention.

COVID-19 is not a seasonal illness, with cases all year round. During the winter it can circulate at the same time as the seasonal respiratory infections such as RSV and flu.

The COVID-19 vaccine is offered on the NHS to people at highest risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19.

## COVID-19 vaccine eligibility

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has updated its [advice for the autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme](#), which has been accepted by Ministers. The focus of the programme is shifting towards targeted vaccination of those at highest risk of serious disease.

For autumn 2025, COVID-19 vaccination will be offered to:

- adults aged 75 years and over
- residents in care homes for older adults
- individuals who are immunosuppressed, aged 6 months and over

This represents a change from the autumn 2024 programme, which also included adults aged 65 to 74, all those aged 6 months and over in a clinical risk group and pregnant women.

The eligibility is the same across the four nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The vaccine should usually be offered no earlier than around 6 months after the last vaccine dose. Those who are eligible can get protection from an autumn COVID-19 vaccination even if they have not taken up a COVID-19 vaccine offer in the past.

We understand that determining having a weakened immune system (immunosuppression) may be less straight forward than the other criteria. Some of the groups eligible include:

- Organ, bone marrow or stem cell transplant patients
- Those being treated with systemic steroids for more than a month
- Those living with HIV
- Those receiving immunosuppressive or immunomodulating biological therapy, including children who are about to receive therapy
- Those undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- Those requiring long-term treatment for immunosuppression
- Those with a history of haematological malignancy including chronic leukaemia, lymphomas, and leukaemia
- Those with genetic disorders affecting the immune system

While this list summarises some major groups, it does not cover everything. Please check online at [nhs.uk/get-vaccine](https://nhs.uk/get-vaccine) to see who is eligible.

# RSV

The RSV vaccine helps protect against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

RSV is a common cause of coughs and colds. Most people get it several times during their life. While the symptoms are mild for many, RSV accounts for around 30,000 hospitalisations of children under 5 in the UK annually, and for 20 to 30 infant deaths.

It usually gets better by itself, but in some people (especially babies and older adults) it can cause illnesses such as:

- [pneumonia](#) (a lung infection)
- [bronchiolitis](#) (a chest infection that affects babies)

These illnesses can cause serious breathing problems. They may need to be treated in hospital and can be life-threatening.

Getting RSV can also make symptoms worse if for those with a lung condition, such as [chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder \(COPD\)](#).

The RSV vaccine helps reduce the risk of serious breathing problems like pneumonia and bronchiolitis. These vaccines will save lives and significantly reduce the burden on the NHS during the challenging winter months.

The RSV vaccine is offered throughout the year, as the infection can happen all year round. RSV infections typically peak during late autumn and winter and we therefore raise awareness of this vaccine offer throughout the winter season.

## RSV vaccine eligibility

The RSV vaccine is recommended to:

- pregnant women – the vaccine is recommended during every pregnancy (from 28 weeks onwards) to help protect their baby from birth and in the first few months of their life when they are more at risk of serious illness
- Those aged 75 to 79

If you turned 80 after 1 September 2024, you remain eligible for the RSV vaccine. You're not eligible for the RSV vaccine if you turned 80 on or before 1 September 2024.

For more information please visit the RSV vaccine page on NHS.uk.



# Public-facing communications campaign

This year there will be one national campaign to encourage uptake of the seasonal flu vaccine as well as the routine vaccinations for pregnant women and children aged 0-5 that are offered year round at specific points in pregnancy and as a child reaches certain ages.

From September, the campaign will highlight the important protection the flu vaccine helps to provide for those that are most vulnerable, and the protection passed from mum to baby whilst pregnant by the RSV and pertussis vaccines.

The flu campaign activity focuses on cohorts where uptake is traditionally lower; pregnant women, children aged 2-3 and school aged children (via their parents) and people living with long-term health conditions.

During the winter, the campaign narrative sets out that flu spreads more easily in winter and can be life-threatening, but that those eligible can protect themselves by having their flu vaccination, helping to reduce the serious illness if they catch it this winter.

The marketing stream of the flu campaign will launch from 22 September. The first will encourage pregnant women to 'Stay strong. Get vaccinated' for flu, RSV and whooping cough.

Further marketing activity will then follow in October to support uptake of flu vaccination amongst people with long-term health conditions. This bold new campaign uses familiar protective imagery like bubble wrap to illustrate vaccination benefits.

The campaign will include TV advertising, broadcast radio, digital and multicultural marketing advertising supported by search, PR and partnership activity.

Printed materials will be available to order from the Campaign Resource Centre (weblink: [Vaccinations | Campaigns | Campaign Resource Centre](#)).

We will provide further details on the campaign in future versions of this toolkit.

# Key messages for the public – flu vaccines

- Flu spreads more easily in winter when we spend more time together indoors, it can cause serious illness.
- Most eligible adults will be able to get their flu vaccine from 1 October. This may be later than you've had the vaccine before, but it means you'll have the best protection when flu is most likely to be circulating widely (December to February). Pregnant women and children will be able to get the flu vaccine from September as protection from vaccination lasts much longer in children than in adults (especially older adults).
- It is important to get protected, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu before, as immunity fades over time and these viruses change each year.
- If you are vaccinated and catch flu this winter, you are likely to have milder symptoms and recover faster, cutting your risk of being hospitalised.
- The flu vaccine programme focuses on those at greatest risk of getting seriously ill.
- Flu often peaks over the festive and New Year period. Nobody wants to miss out on the festive celebrations with their friends and family this winter and the vaccines provide the best possible protection.
- Those eligible for a flu vaccine include:
  - people with certain long term health conditions, from 6 months to under 65s
  - people aged 65 and over
  - pregnant women
  - all children aged 2 or 3 years old on 31 August 2025
  - primary school aged children (from Reception to year 6)
  - secondary school aged children (from year 7 to Year 11)
  - care home residents
  - carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
  - close contacts of immunocompromised individuals
  - frontline health and social care workers
- Parents of children who are aged 2 or 3 (on or before 31 August 2025) 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.
- Pregnant women are eligible for the seasonal flu vaccine if they are pregnant at any time in the flu season, as well as whooping cough and RSV vaccines at certain times during their pregnancy. Pregnant women should speak to their GP or midwife for more information.
- Pregnant women are vaccinated against RSV and whooping cough to protect their newborn baby but there are 3 reasons for pregnant women to get vaccinated against flu; the pregnant woman herself, the unborn baby and the newborn baby are all at risk of getting seriously ill from flu.
- All those eligible are urged to join the millions of others who have their free flu vaccine to help them stay strong this winter – don't put it off, book your appointment today and arm yourself against the risk of severe illness.
- You will be able check your eligibility online at <http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations>

## Messaging for those with certain long-term health conditions (flu)

Flu spreads more easily in winter because we spend more time indoors with others. Flu causes serious illness for people with certain long-term health conditions<sup>1</sup>:

- If you have liver disease, you are around 48 times more likely to die from flu.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: '[Influenza-related population mortality rates and relative risk of death among those age 6 months to under 65 years by clinical risk group in England, September 2010 to May 2011](#)' (table 19.1 of Chapter 19: Influenza) in the Green Book.

- If you are immunosuppressed, you are around 47 times more likely to die from flu.
- If you have neurological disease, you are around 40 times more likely to die from flu.
- If you have from kidney disease, you are around 19 times more likely to die from flu.
- Those with heart disease are around 11 times more likely to die from flu.
- Those with respiratory disease are around 7 times more likely to die from flu.
- Those with diabetes are around 6 times more likely to die from flu.

### Vaccine efficacy

- You can reduce your chances of being hospitalised with flu by nearly half just by getting vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>
- If you catch flu and you are vaccinated, your symptoms will be milder and recovery quicker.

## Messaging for pregnant women (flu)

- Flu spreads more easily in winter because we spend more time indoors with others. Flu can be serious during pregnancy for women and their babies.
- Pregnancy alters the way the body handles infections such as flu.
- Flu infection increases the chances of pregnant women and their babies needing intensive care.
- A pregnant woman who catches flu is more likely to need admission to hospital than a woman who isn't pregnant.

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<sup>2</sup> Last season, in adults aged 18 to 64 years, the flu vaccine was effective at reducing chances of hospitalisation by nearly 50% (46.1%)

- Flu can be serious for unborn and newborn babies and can lead to premature birth and low birth weight.
- Pregnant women have a higher chance of developing complications if they get flu, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy.
- As well as flu, pregnant women should also get their RSV vaccine and whooping cough vaccine. Both vaccines boost mum's antibodies which are passed through the placenta to the baby protecting them in the first few months of life and can stop them from becoming seriously ill. Pregnant women should speak to their GP or midwife for more information.

### Vaccine efficacy

Pregnant women benefit from flu vaccination because it can:

- Reduce their risk of serious complications such as pneumonia, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy.
- Reduce the risk of mother or baby needing intensive care.
- Reduce the risk of their baby being born prematurely.
- Reduce the chance of the mother passing the flu to her new baby.
- 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 when they are particularly at risk from flu.

### Vaccine safety

- Since 2009, a number of countries have offered the flu vaccine routinely to all pregnant women.
- Studies show that flu vaccines can be safely administered during all stages of pregnancy for both mother and baby.
- It's safe to have the flu vaccine during any stage of pregnancy, from the first few weeks up to your expected due date.

# Messaging for parents of 2- and 3-year-olds (flu)

- Flu spreads more easily among children in winter because we all spend more time indoors with others.
- Children are more likely to catch winter viruses like flu, which can spread to other family members, such as grandparents.
- Flu tends to spread first in children, so vaccinating children as early as possible helps to protect them and other vulnerable family members such as grandparents and newborn babies.

## Serious illness

- The flu vaccine will help protect your child against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia.
- Children under the age of 5 years have one of the highest rates of hospital admissions due to flu.
- During the 2022/2023 season over 6,000 under 5s in England were hospitalised by flu.
- Vaccinating your child will help protect them, and more vulnerable friends and family.
- The flu viruses can change from one winter to the next, that's why it is important to have your child vaccinated.

## Vaccine efficacy

- Last season, in children aged 2 to 17 years, having a flu vaccine was effective in reducing their chance of hospitalisation by over 60% (62.2%)
- Having the flu vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a serious illness.
- If your child is vaccinated and catches flu their symptoms will be milder and their recovery quicker.

## Vaccine safety

- Children in the UK have been given the nasal flu vaccine for many years and this vaccine has an excellent safety record. Some children have mild side effects, and

serious side-effects are very rare. Over 34 million doses have been given to children in the UK since 2013.

- These side effects may sometimes follow nasal spray vaccination: a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness, and loss of appetite. However, these are much milder than developing flu or complications associated with flu.

## Messaging for people with a learning disability and their carers

- Every year in England, lots of people get flu in winter. Flu is a virus that makes you feel ill.
- Some people with a learning disability are more likely to be very ill if they get flu.
- The best way to avoid getting flu is to have a flu vaccine. This is an injection and it is free.
- You can have the flu vaccine at your GP surgery or at a pharmacy.
- If you are scared of needles, tell a nurse. You may be able to have the vaccine as a spray instead.
- Family carers and paid support workers may be able to have the free flu vaccine so they don't pass flu on to you.
- An easy read leaflet is available: [Protect yourself from flu, have the flu vaccine](#).
- To **parents/carers of infants of children who are eligible for the flu vaccine**: Flu vaccination is really important to keep your child safe, as flu can be serious in infants and very young children. It also helps to stop the spread to other members of the family.
- To **carers**: if you are in receipt of carers allowance or a main carer, then make sure you are registered at your local GP, to access a free flu vaccine so that you don't pass this onto your loved ones or become ill yourself. Ask your GP surgery to be added to the carers register.

## Key messages for health and care professionals (flu)

- Flu infections spread more easily in winter when we spend more time together indoors, and both viruses can cause serious illness.
- As a frontline health or care professional, you're more likely to be exposed to these viruses.
- If you are vaccinated and catch flu this winter, you are likely to have milder symptoms and recover faster.
- Getting vaccinated will reduce the risk of you bringing the flu home from work.
- We urge you to come forward for your flu vaccine as soon as possible to protect yourself and keep you able to help patients during winter.
- Frontline health and care professionals will be offered the flu vaccine from 1 October and should check the local arrangements. They can also book a flu vaccine online at <http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations> from 1 September, with appointments starting from 1 October.
- The seasonal flu vaccine will be offered to all frontline healthcare workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff, through their employer from 1 October 2025.

## Messaging for healthcare professionals' payroll

Line 1: As a frontline healthcare professional,

Line 2: you're more likely to be exposed to flu.

Line 3: If you are vaccinated and catch flu this winter,

Line 4: you are likely to have milder symptoms and recover faster.

Line 5: For more information visit [www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations)



## Key messages – COVID-19

- COVID-19 spreads more easily in winter because we spend more time indoors with others. The autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme is a targeted offer to those at highest risk of serious disease.
- Topping up your COVID-19 vaccination will reduce serious symptoms and speed up your recovery if you do catch COVID-19. This protection will last through winter.
- Having flu and COVID-19 at the same time can be very serious for people who are immunosuppressed.

### Vaccine efficacy

- Having a COVID-19 vaccine is effective to reduce your chances of hospitalisation by around 50%, compared to those who had their last dose at least 6 months ago and who do not opt to receive a vaccine.

### Vaccine safety

- The COVID-19 vaccines have good safety records and are effective. It gives you the best protection against COVID-19.

## Key messages – RSV

### General:

- RSV is a major cause of respiratory illness, and is particularly dangerous for infants and the elderly. The virus can lead to pneumonia and infant bronchiolitis, requiring hospitalisation and intensive care in severe cases.
- The RSV vaccine offers huge opportunities to prevent severe illness in those most vulnerable to RSV, helping to protect lives and ease winter pressures for the NHS.
- The RSV vaccine is offered free on the NHS to pregnant women from 28 weeks, and adults aged 75 to 79, or turned 80 after 1 September 2024.

- RSV vaccines are around 75% to 80% effective (for older people, and for newborns when mothers are vaccinated at least 14 days before birth)<sup>3</sup>.

### Maternal:

- RSV is a common virus that can make babies seriously ill. Young babies are more likely to be very ill and to need hospital care if they catch RSV.
- The RSV vaccine is given during pregnancy, and passes on protection against RSV infection through the placenta to the baby.
- The best way to protect babies against RSV infection is for the mother to have the vaccine during pregnancy. Pregnant women can have the RSV vaccine to help protect their babies from birth, and in the first few months of their life when they are more at risk of serious illness and to need hospital care.
- Pregnant women are eligible for the RSV vaccine when they reach 28 weeks of pregnancy.
- It is important to have the RSV vaccine at the right time to give the baby the best protection, but it is possible to have the RSV vaccine up until birth.
- An RSV vaccine is needed in every pregnancy to give your new baby the best protection.
- If you haven't been offered the vaccine around the time of your 28-week antenatal appointment, contact your maternity service to make an appointment.

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<sup>3</sup> A UKHSA study - Effectiveness of RSV Vaccine Against RSV Associated Hospitalisation Among Adults Aged 75 to 79 years in England - in partnership with Nottingham University Hospitals and other NHS trusts, shows the RSV vaccine provided strong protection for older people, around 82% effective in preventing hospital admissions with RSV infection. A separate study - Vaccination in Pregnancy and RSV Hospitalisation in Infants in the UK, led by NHS paediatricians, published in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health - found that the maternal RSV vaccine was 72% effective in preventing hospitalisation for infants whose mothers were vaccinated more than 14 days before delivery. Further information: [RSV vaccine highly effective in preventing hospitalisation - GOV.UK](#); [Vaccine effectiveness of the maternal RSVpre-F vaccine against severe disease in infants in Scotland, UK: national population-based case-control and cohort analyses](#) (6 August 2025)

- The RSV vaccine has been approved by medicines regulators in the UK, Europe and USA, and recommended by the World Health Organization, on the basis of protection, quality and safety. Monitoring, from over 500,000 doses given shows a good safety profile.<sup>4</sup>

### **Older Adults:**

- The RSV vaccine helps protect against infection with RSV, a common virus that can make older adults seriously ill.
- A single dose of RSV vaccine will help to boost protection as you reach an age group at highest risk of serious RSV infection.
- If you're aged 75 to 79 (or turned 80 after 1 September 2024) contact your GP surgery to book your RSV vaccination. You do not need to wait to be contacted before booking your vaccination.
- Over 12 million doses have been given to older adults in the USA and UK. The benefits of an NHS vaccine to prevent RSV outweigh the rare risk of a serious side effect.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [A guide to RSV vaccination for pregnant women](#) (UKHSA)

<sup>5</sup> [A guide to RSV vaccine for older adults](#) (UKHSA)

# Key messages for the public – preventing the spread of infection/winter behaviours

## General

If you don't feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, try to stay at home and avoid contact with others.

## Respiratory infections (flu, RSV, and COVID-19)

- If you have symptoms such as a high temperature, cough and feeling tired and achy, try to limit your contact with others, especially those who are vulnerable. If you have symptoms and need to leave the house, our advice remains that you should wear a face covering. Washing hands regularly and using and disposing of tissues in bins can reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses.

## Norovirus

- If you have diarrhoea and/or vomiting, do not go to work, school, or nursery until 48 hours after your symptoms have stopped and don't prepare food for others in that time either. If you are unwell, avoid visiting people in hospitals and care homes to prevent passing on the infection in these settings.
- Washing your hands with soap and warm water and using bleach-based products to clean surfaces will also help stop infections from spreading. Alcohol gels do not kill norovirus so don't rely on these alone.

## Messages aimed at parents and carers of babies and children

- Staying healthy and taking simple steps to reduce the spread of illness will ensure your children and wider family experience less disruption at this time of year.
- Each winter, we see an increase in acute respiratory and gastro-intestinal illnesses, however it only takes small measures to reduce the spread of most of these infections. By following advice on good hygiene habits, knowing when to keep your child off school and taking up the opportunity to get vaccinated when offered, you can protect your child and the wider community.
- It can be difficult to tell when a baby or toddler is seriously ill, but the main thing is to trust your instincts. You know better than anyone else what your child is usually like,

so you'll know when something is seriously wrong. You should seek medical help if you're worried your child is seriously unwell. Further advice on serious illness can be found on the [NHS website](#).

## Useful statistics

- Last year in England, flu caused around 8,000 deaths, while vaccination prevented an estimated 96,000 to 120,200 hospitalisations<sup>6</sup>.
- Respiratory infections like flu spread more easily in winter because we spend more time indoors with others. In 2022/2023, over 49,000 people were hospitalised with flu and 2,000 people in England were admitted to an intensive care unit.
- Children under the age of 5 years have one of the highest rates of hospital admissions due to flu. During the 2022 / 2023 season over 6,000 under 5s in England were hospitalised by flu. In the week up to Christmas 2022, over 1,000 children under 5 were hospitalised by flu in England.

## Community pharmacy delivery of 2- and 3-year-old flu vaccinations

Something new for the 2025 to 2026 flu season is that it will be possible for community pharmacies to offer vaccination to children aged 2 and 3 years. This aims to help support improvements in access and uptake. Community pharmacy service delivery will begin from 1 October 2025, supplementing the offer in General Practice who will start vaccinating from the 1 September 2025, or as soon as vaccine is available.

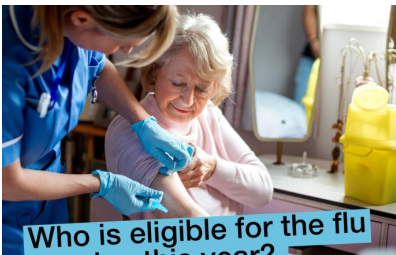
We will update this toolkit and its messages with further information about this operational delivery.

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<sup>6</sup> [Data published in May 2025](#) by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that the flu vaccine is estimated to have prevented around 96,000 to 120,200 people from being hospitalised in England last winter (2024/5).

## Social media resources

We have an initial social media asset aimed at raising awareness of the flu vaccination offer and the eligible cohorts:

Asset	Suggested post copy
<p><b>Who is eligible for the flu vaccine this year?</b></p>  <p><b>Who is eligible for the flu vaccine this year?</b></p> <p><b>From 1 September 2025:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pregnant women</li> <li>all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2025</li> <li>Children with certain long-term health conditions (aged 6 months to less than 18 years)</li> <li>primary school aged children (from reception to Year 6)</li> <li>secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)</li> <li>all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to under 18 years</li> </ul> <p><b>From 1 October 2025:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>everyone aged 65 years and over</li> <li>individuals aged 18 to under 65 with certain long-term health conditions</li> <li>care home residents</li> <li>carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person</li> <li>those living with people who are immunocompromised</li> <li>frontline health and social care workers</li> </ul>	<p>Booking is now open for your free NHS flu vaccination. 💉</p> <p>Check if you're eligible and book online or via the NHS App for appointments from 1 October. 📅</p>

NHS England has produced some communications resources to support healthcare and social care organisations in increasing flu vaccine uptake amongst frontline staff. These include posters, leaflets, digital screens, email signatures, stickers and social media assets. These can be found on the [Campaign Resource Centre](#).

*Further social media resources will be added to future versions of this toolkit.*

## Flu publications

Leaflets remain an effective way of communicating the benefits of having a flu vaccine and inform the consent process. It is important that people receive a leaflet in a format that meets their needs, with accessible versions being an important way to improve uptake in underserved communities. We also want everyone to have a positive vaccination experience and having accessible information is part of that experience.

Our leaflets and resources are all available to download and many can also be ordered for free. We have a wide range of leaflets in translated versions:

- simple text
- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- video British Sign Language versions
- easy read and video for those who have a learning disability

There are also HTML versions which are text only. This helps search engines on the web that look for content, people who use screen readers and assisted technology. HTML versions can also be signposted to in e-consent forms which need to include leaflets when asking for consent. If using e-consent it is important to recognise that not all parents and carers have access to digital resources, so it is important to provide printed leaflets as well.








Schools and the school aged immunisation service can identify which accessible versions would be helpful for their cohorts. For example, if there are students who are deaf or use British Sign Language (BSL), they can make the videos available on screens or share the link with parents and children. It is important to recognise that many BSL users rely on BSL resources as written literacy in this group can be lower.

Stay up to date with all of the publications to support the annual flu programme on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).


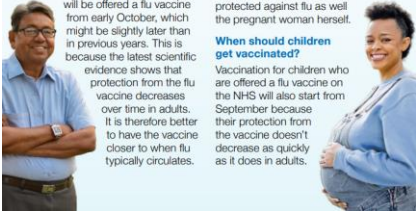


***Specific links to health publications (including leaflets and posters) will be added to future versions of this toolkit.***

## Leaflets

Leaflet	Overview
<b>Protecting your child against flu – information for parents and carers</b>	<p>Available in 34 languages this leaflet is for parents and carers. It explains why children are eligible for a flu vaccination, as well as describing the disease and the nasal flu vaccine.</p> <p>Copies can be downloaded from <a href="https://www.gov.uk">GOV.UK</a> or ordered on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p> <p>This leaflet is available to order and download in the following languages: Albanian, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Dari, Estonian, Farsi, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Nepali, Panjabi, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romany, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Yiddish, and Yoruba.</p>



 <p><b>Protecting your child against flu</b> Flu immunisation in England</p> <p>Information for parents and carers</p>  <p>Flu mmunisation Helping to protect children, every winter</p>	<p>Please note the images on the translated versions, large print, audio and braille differ to the English version.</p>
<p><b>Protect yourself against flu: information for those in secondary school</b></p>   <p><b>Protect yourself against flu</b> Flu immunisation in England Information for those in secondary school</p>  <p>Flu mmunisation Helping to protect you against flu</p>	<p>This leaflet is aimed at young people and explains why they are eligible for a flu vaccination, as well as describing the disease and the nasal flu vaccine.</p> <p>Copies can be downloaded from <a href="https://www.gov.uk">GOV.UK</a> or ordered for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a></p> <p>This leaflet is available to order and download in the following languages: Albanian, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Dari, Estonian, Farsi, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Nepali, Panjabi, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romany, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Yiddish, and Yoruba</p>
<p><b>‘When should I have my flu vaccine?’ flyer</b></p>	<p>This flyer explains why adults eligible for the flu vaccine will be offered a flu vaccine from early October this year. This is based on the latest scientific evidence that shows that protection from the flu vaccine decreases over time in adults. It is therefore better to have the vaccine closer to when flu typically circulates. This flyer can be downloaded from <a href="https://www.gov.uk">GOV.UK</a> or ordered for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a></p>



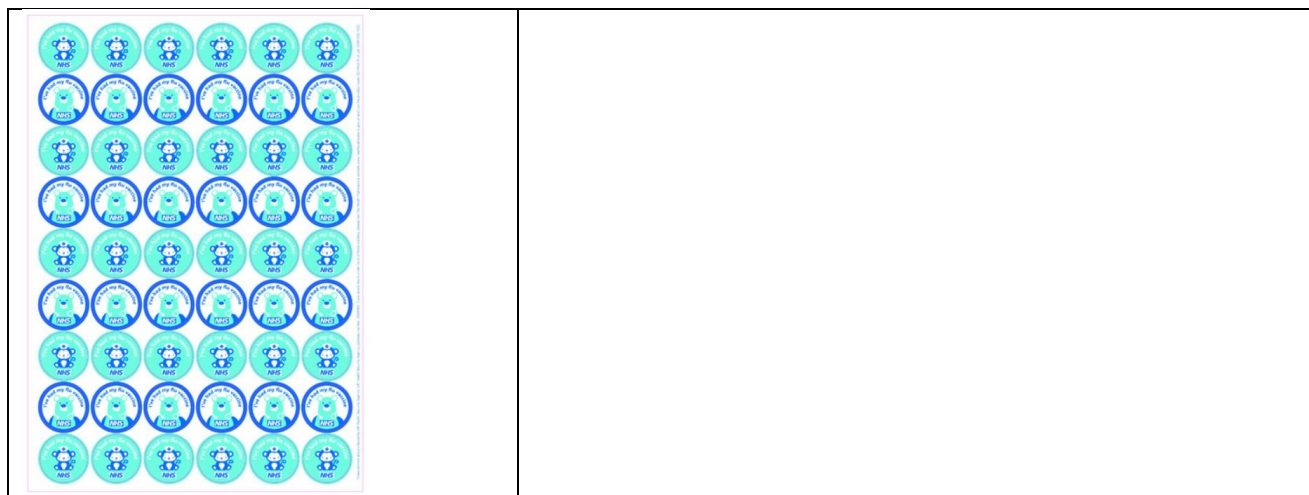
 <p><b>When should I get my flu vaccine?</b> Information for adults eligible for a flu vaccine on the NHS</p> <p><b>Who should have a flu vaccine?</b> Flu vaccination is recommended for those who are most at risk of serious complications if they get flu. For adults this includes everyone aged 65 years and over, pregnant women, and those with certain long-term health conditions. Flu can be a serious illness in these people and the vaccine offers the best protection.</p> <p><b>Why do I have to wait until October for my flu vaccine?</b> This year most eligible adults will be offered a flu vaccine from early October, which might be slightly later than in previous years. This is because the latest scientific evidence shows that protection from the flu vaccine decreases over time in adults. It is therefore better to have the vaccine closer to when flu typically circulates.</p> <p><b>When should pregnant women get vaccinated?</b> Pregnant women should have the vaccine from September. This is because the protection from the vaccine is passed through the placenta to the baby, giving the baby protection for the first few months of life when they are particularly at risk from flu. Therefore pregnant women shouldn't delay vaccination, especially those who are heavily pregnant, as babies born during the flu season need to be protected against flu as well the pregnant woman herself.</p> <p><b>When should children get vaccinated?</b> Vaccination for children who are offered a flu vaccine on the NHS will also start from September because their protection from the vaccine doesn't decrease as quickly as it does in adults.</p> 	
<p><b>The 'flu vaccination: who should have it and why' leaflet</b></p>  <p><b>The flu vaccination</b> Who should have it and why</p> <p>Includes information for parents and pregnant women</p>  <p>Flu <b>i</b>mmunisation Helping to protect people every winter</p>	<p>This leaflet explains to patients how they can help protect themselves and their children against flu this winter. It includes information about eligible children, adults and pregnant women.</p> <p>You can <a href="#">download the leaflet</a> or order it for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p> <p>Accessible formats such as Audio, Braille, BSL video and Large Print are also available.</p> <p>Translations of this leaflet are available to download or order as a paper copy: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional, Cantonese), Estonian, Farsi, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Panjabi, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romany, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Yiddish and Yoruba.</p>

## Guidance and resources for schools

<p><b>Flu vaccination programme: briefing for primary schools</b></p>	<p>This guide gives details about the flu vaccination programme for primary school-aged children including how the programme is delivered and the role schools play. It can be downloaded from <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> and ordered for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>
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<p><b>Adolescent vaccination programme: briefing for secondary schools</b></p> 	<p>This guide explains the NHS adolescent vaccination programmes delivered to children in secondary schools and the important role that schools play in the delivery of them. It includes information on the flu vaccination programme. <a href="#">You can download the document</a> or order it for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>
<p><b>Flu vaccine consent forms</b></p>	<p>This year the vaccine consent forms for the nasal spray vaccine and flu vaccine by injection have been combined into a single form, <a href="#">available for school aged immunisation service providers</a>.</p>
<p><b>Letter template inviting school aged children for vaccination</b></p>	<p>You can <a href="#">download a letter template for school age immunisation provider teams</a>.</p>
<p><b>5 reasons to vaccinate your child against flu – primary school and pre-school version</b></p>	<p>This poster is aimed at parents and carers and explains the benefits of vaccinating children against flu. It is available as translated versions in a number of community languages.</p> <p>You can <a href="#">download a copy</a> or ordered for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a> on GOV.UK.</p>

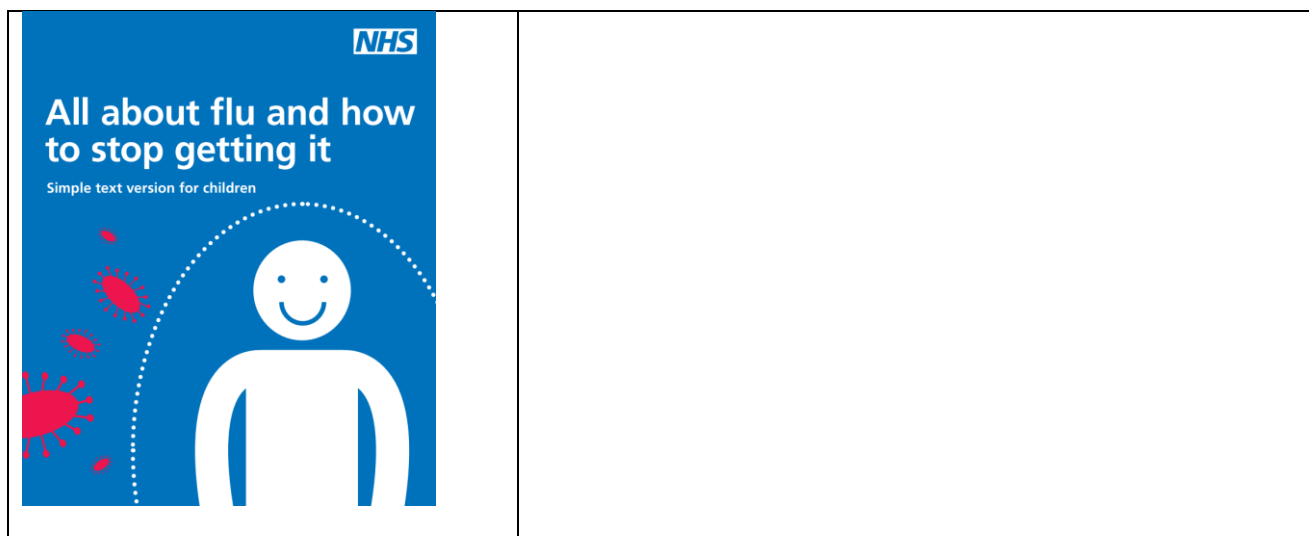
 <p><b>flu: 5 reasons to vaccinate your child</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Protect your child</b> The vaccine will help protect your child against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia</li> <li><b>2. Protect you, your family and friends</b> Vaccinating your child will help protect more vulnerable friends and family</li> <li><b>3. No injection needed</b> The nasal spray is painless and easy to have</li> <li><b>4. It's better than having flu</b> The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions of children worldwide and has an excellent safety record</li> <li><b>5. Avoid costs</b> If your child gets flu, you may have to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare</li> </ol> <p>Most children have the nasal spray vaccine which is the preferred vaccine. A vaccine injection is also available which does not contain gelatine from pigs (pneumococcal).</p> <p>For more information visit <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu">www.nhs.uk/child-flu</a></p> <p>Flu  mmunisation Helping to protect children, every winter</p>	
<p><b>5 reasons to vaccinate your child against flu – secondary school version</b></p>  <p><b>flu: 5 reasons to have the vaccine</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Protect yourself</b> The vaccine will help protect you against flu and serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia</li> <li><b>2. Protect your family and friends</b> Having the vaccine will help protect more vulnerable friends and family</li> <li><b>3. No injection needed</b> The nasal spray is painless and easy to have</li> <li><b>4. It's better than having flu</b> The nasal spray helps protect against flu, has been given to millions worldwide and has an excellent safety record</li> <li><b>5. Avoid lost opportunities</b> If you get flu, you may be unwell for several days and not be able to do the things you enjoy</li> </ol> <p>For more information visit <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu">www.nhs.uk/child-flu</a></p> <p>Most children have the nasal spray vaccine which is the preferred vaccine. A vaccine injection is also available which does not contain gelatine from pigs (pneumococcal).</p> <p>Flu  mmunisation Helping to protect you against flu</p>	<p>This poster is aimed at young people and explains the benefits of having the flu vaccine. It is available as translated versions in a number of community languages.</p> <p>You can <a href="#">download a copy</a> or ordered for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a> on GOV.UK.</p>
<p><b>Stickers</b></p>	<p>Stickers are available for healthcare practitioners to give to children who have received a flu vaccine either at their GP practice or school.</p> <p>There are 72 stickers per sheet. You can <a href="#">view these stickers</a> or order for free on <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>



## Simple text versions

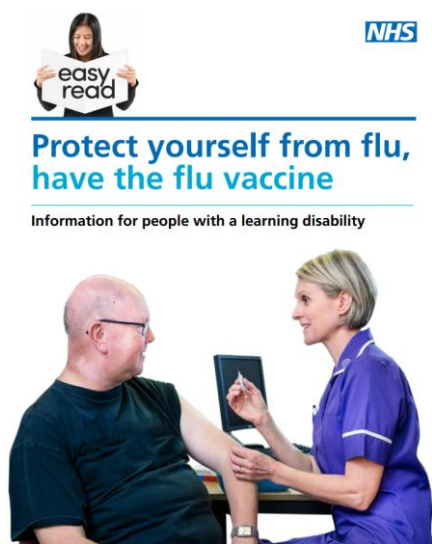
Aimed at individuals with lower literacy levels, simple text versions “All about flu and how to stop getting it”, are available for use in a variety of settings.

<p><b>All about flu and vaccination – adults</b></p> 	<p>You can <a href="#">download a copy</a> or order from <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>
<p><b>All about flu and vaccination – children</b></p>	<p>You can <a href="#">download a copy</a> or order from <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>




### Resources for those with a learning disability

Several resources are available for those with a learning disability. They are aimed at people who have a learning disability or who have autism or who care for someone with a learning disability. They [provide advice on the flu virus and why you need a vaccine every year](#).

<p><b>Protect yourself from flu: easy-read leaflet</b></p> 	<p>You can <a href="#">view the easy-read leaflet</a> or order paper copies <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>
<p><b>Protect yourself from flu: easy read poster</b></p>	<p>You can <a href="#">view the easy-read poster</a> or order paper copies <a href="#">Find Public Health Resources</a>.</p>





 <p><b>Get your free flu jab</b></p> <p>Some people with a learning disability can get very ill if they get flu.</p> <p>The best way to avoid flu is to get a free flu jab.</p> <p><b>NHS GP surgery</b> You can have the flu jab at your GP surgery.</p> <p><b>Pharmacy +</b> Or you can have the flu jab at a pharmacy.</p> <p>If you are scared of needles, tell the nurse. You may be able to have the vaccine as a nose spray instead.</p>	
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## Flu vaccination films for people with a learning disability and autistic people and their family or carers

2 short films about the importance of the flu vaccination for people with a learning disability and autistic people with certain health conditions.

The importance and range of reasonable adjustments that can be made so people with a learning disability or other disabilities have good access to healthcare is explained in this film. Resources and tools to support this legal requirement can be found on the website from the [NHS England website](#).

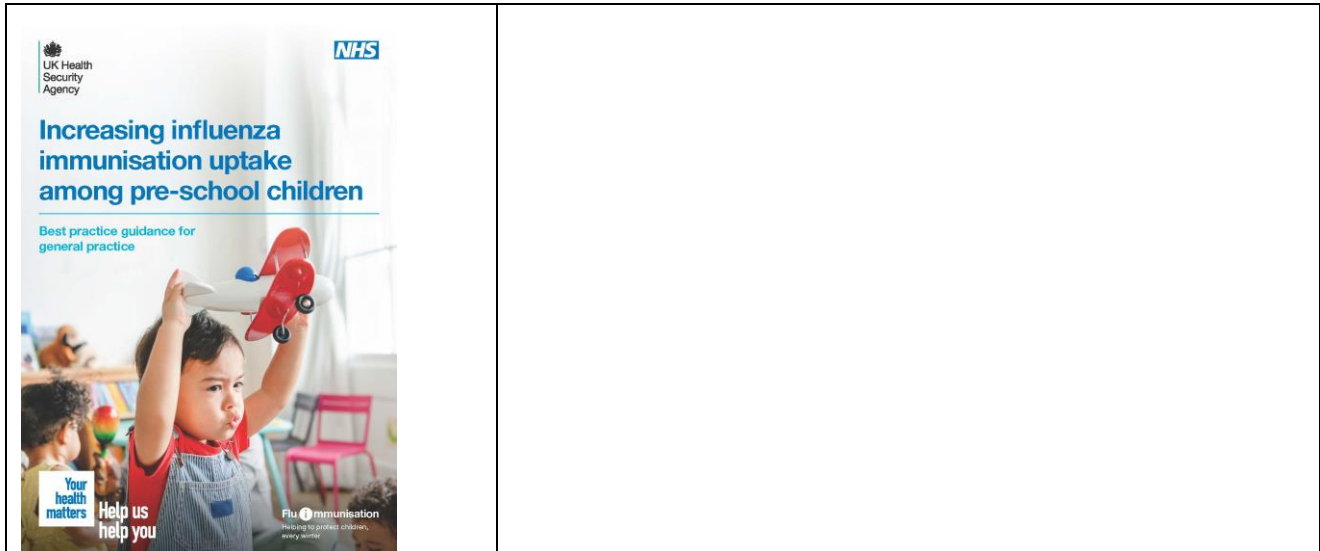
<p><b>Flu vaccination film for carers</b></p> 	<p>The film covers why it is important, who is eligible for a free vaccine, where you can get the vaccine and reasonable adjustments and is available from <a href="#">UKHSA YouTube for carers</a>.</p>
<p><b>Flu vaccination film for those with a learning disability</b></p> 	<p>The film covers why it is important, who is eligible for a free vaccine, where you can get the vaccine and reasonable adjustments and is available from <a href="#">UKHSA YouTube for those with a learning disability</a>.</p>

## Flu vaccination for pre-school children

<p><b>Immunising preschool children against flu: Information for practitioners working in early years settings, including childminders</b></p> 	<p>You can <a href="#">download this leaflet</a> from GOV.UK, which is about the annual flu vaccination programme for preschool children. It informs those working in the early years sector about the programme and how they can support it. It is aimed at nursery and preschool managers and staff, and childminders delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, and those who provide informal childcare, such as nannies.</p>
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## Letter templates for General Practice

<p><b>Flu vaccination: letter template for children aged 2 and 3 years</b></p>	<p>GP practices can use this template to invite parents and guardians to get their child vaccinated at the local surgery. You can <a href="#">download this document</a> on GOV.UK.</p>
<p><b>Flu vaccination: letter template for at risk patients and carers</b></p>	<p>Template for GPs to invite patients at risk of flu due to a medical condition, pregnancy or age, and those who receive a carer's allowance or are the main carer for an older or disabled person, to have their annual flu vaccine. You can <a href="#">download this document</a> on GOV.UK</p>
<p><b>GP best practice guidance: Increasing flu vaccine uptake in preschool children</b></p>	<p>This resource sets out steps that General Practice can take to improve flu vaccine uptake in children aged 2 and 3 years old. You can <a href="#">download this document</a> on GOV.UK.</p>



## Resources from the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA)

The British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) have updated their two resources which explain the benefits of flu vaccination, the Islamic position on taking up the vaccine, and how to weigh up whether your children should have the nasal spray vaccine given the porcine gelatine content and conflict with a halal diet.

These resources have been designed and published by BIMA, and we are sharing with stakeholders with their permission.

BIMA are happy to be contacted for any local queries on [info@britishima.org](mailto:info@britishima.org)

<p><b>BIMA – Flu vaccination guidance</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Available to download via the BIMA website</a></p>
<p><b>BIMA – ‘Should my child have the nasal flu spray?’</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Available to download via the BIMA website</a></p>





## UKHSA communications activity this winter

Each week throughout the winter season, we publish a Weekly Winter Briefing [[link to this winter's rolling news story to follow](#)]. This is posted on the UKHSA news page of GOV.UK and provides a summary of the RSV, flu and COVID-19 data found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

Throughout the winter season, we will use our national and regional channels and networks to communicate health security messages, in response to the data and surveillance. This will include messaging about how people can prevent the spread of infection through, and encouraging eligible people to take up vaccine offers.

We will include a summary of our latest norovirus data from our [National norovirus and rotavirus surveillance reports](#).

We will also include key information for the public, and visualisations of the data and health messages on our social media channels.

## UKHSA data dashboard

The [UKHSA data dashboard](#) shows public health data across England.

The dashboard currently presents a range of data on respiratory viruses. You can also view any weather health alerts issued warning of adverse weather. We will also add data for other health topics should they be declared on a case-by-case basis. In the future, it will grow to present a wider range of data on public health topics in line with the remit of the UKHSA.

We update the UKHSA data dashboard every Thursday. To see when we add new data for each specific metric, check the page for that virus.

Several metrics featured on this dashboard are published less frequently during the summer. This includes healthcare data for influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Weekly reporting will resume from 9 October 2025.

## Blogs

- UKHSA: [What winter bug do I have? Know the signs and symptoms](#)
- UKHSA: [5 reasons to vaccinate your under-5s against flu](#)
- UKHSA: [How we monitor flu and other respiratory viruses each winter](#)
- UKHSA: [Your guide to who's eligible for the autumn 2025 flu vaccine](#)
- UKHSA: [Who's eligible for the 2025 COVID-19 vaccine, or 'Autumn Booster'?](#)

## Press releases

- NHS England: [NHS kicks off winter vaccine roll out with flu jabs for children and pregnant women](#) (1 September)
- Department of Health and Social Care: [Government to combat flu outbreaks by removing red tape](#)<sup>7</sup> (1 September)
- UKHSA: [Flu vaccine prevented around 100,000 hospital admissions](#) (22 May 2025)

## Further information

- NHS: [Flu](#)
  - NHS: [Flu jab](#)
  - NHS: [Child flu](#)
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<sup>7</sup> The government is removing the restriction that means certain flu medications cannot begin to be prescribed outside the usual 'flu season' until an annual letter of confirmation from the Chief Medical Officer is received

- NHS: [Pregnancy and flu](#)
- NHS: [COVID-19](#)
- NHS: [Respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#)
- UKHSA, NHS England, Department of Health and Social Care: [National flu immunisation programme plan 2025 to 2026](#)
- UKHSA: [Flu vaccination programme 2025 to 2026: information for healthcare practitioners](#)
- UKHSA: [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports: 2025 to 2026 season](#)
- NHS: [Dear Colleague letter](#) highlighting the staff flu vaccination campaign as a national priority and setting out next steps to support leaders and their teams to deliver a high impact programme this year.
- UKHSA: [COVID-19 vaccination: information for healthcare practitioners](#)
- UKHSA: [RSV vaccination of pregnant women for infant protection: information for healthcare practitioners](#)
- UKHSA: [RSV vaccination of older adults: information for healthcare practitioners](#)
- UKHSA: [Sources of surveillance data for influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses](#)
- UKHSA: [National norovirus and rotavirus surveillance reports: 2025 to 2026 season](#)

## FAQs

### Flu vaccination

#### **Who is most at risk?**

People in older age groups, babies under 6 months of age and children under 5 years of age, pregnant women, and those with certain long- term 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. Mothers can protect their babies under 6 months by getting the vaccine in pregnancy.

#### **Who is eligible?**

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

The following groups are to be offered flu vaccination:

From 1 September 2025:

- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2025
- primary school aged children (from Reception to Year 6)
- secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)
- all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years

From 1 October 2025:

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged 18 years to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (as defined by the [Green Book, Influenza chapter 19](#))
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- close 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

All frontline health care workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff who have contact with patients, should be offered flu vaccine from the start of October as a vital part of the organisation's policy for the prevention of the transmission of flu.

Social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to flu should also have the flu vaccine provided by their employer. There are circumstances where frontline staff, employed by specific social care providers without access to employer led occupational health schemes (see [cohort eligibility](#) above), can access the vaccine through the NHS free of charge.

All frontline health care workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff who have contact with patients, should be offered flu vaccine from 1 October as a vital part of the organisations' policy for the prevention of the transmission of flu.

For further details on eligibility please visit the [NHS website](#).

### **Why do I have to wait until October for my flu vaccine?**

This year most eligible adults will be offered a flu vaccine from 1 October because the latest scientific evidence shows that protection from the flu vaccine decreases over time in adults. It is better to have the vaccine closer to when flu typically circulates, to help you to have maximum protection at the time of highest risk.

## When can I book?

### Pregnant women

- From 1 September 2025, if you are pregnant you may be offered your vaccinations directly by a local NHS service, such as your local maternity service, local pharmacy or GP surgery.
- The flu vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy, but it's best to get vaccinated as soon as you can.
- You can book your vaccinations via the NHS App, online at [www.nhs.uk/bookflu](https://www.nhs.uk/bookflu) and [www.nhs.uk/bookcovid](https://www.nhs.uk/bookcovid) or through 119 if you can't get online.

### Children

- Evidence shows that flu circulates earlier in children. Children's protection from the vaccine doesn't decrease as quickly as it does in adults, so children can get the flu vaccine from September to help protect them - and to help stop flu spreading.
- From 1 September 2025, school-aged children can get their flu vaccine through school or community venues. Those aged 2-3 years old (on 31 August 2025), and children aged 6 months and older in specific clinical risk groups, can get the flu vaccine at their GP surgery.

### Eligible adults

- Flu vaccines will be available to eligible adults from 1 October 2025. Evidence shows that the vaccine's effectiveness can wane over time, so getting vaccinated later will ensure those most at risk are protected during the colder months when people gather indoors and winter viruses spread more easily.
- You may be invited by the NHS, but you do not need to wait for an invite to come forwards. If you are eligible, ask your GP practice or a pharmacy that offers NHS flu vaccination when you can book an appointment.
- Thousands of sites are offering the flu vaccines to make it as easy and convenient as possible for people to get protection.
- From 1 September, you can start booking your flu vaccinations on the NHS App, or book online at [www.nhs.uk/bookflu](https://www.nhs.uk/bookflu). Can't get online? Call 119. Appointments will be available from 1 October.
- From 1 October, you can find a pharmacy offering flu vaccines at [www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy](https://www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy) (18+ only) or book your flu vaccine directly with you GP surgery
- Read more on winter vaccines and how to book at [www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations](https://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations).

### Frontline health and social care workers

- We urge you to come forward for your flu vaccine as soon as possible to protect yourself and your patients, and reduce pressure on the NHS during winter.
- The seasonal flu vaccine will be offered to all frontline healthcare workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff, through their employer from 1 October. Social care staff without an employer-led occupational health scheme can continue to access the

flu vaccination through their GP, community pharmacy or by booking online at [www.nhs.uk/bookflu](https://www.nhs.uk/bookflu)

### **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. Protection from flu vaccination goes down with time. Also 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 circulating. We strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

### **Can you get a flu vaccine privately?**

If you are not eligible for the free flu vaccination, you can pay to receive the flu vaccine from a pharmacy.

### **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 2025) are eligible for a free flu vaccine via their GP practice. Most children have a nasal spray vaccine.

If someone is clinically unable to receive the nasal flu spray, or objects to it because it contains porcine (pork) gelatine, they can be offered an inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) by injection instead.

#### **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.

During the 2022 / 2023 season over 6,000 under 5s in England were hospitalised by flu. In the week up to Christmas 2022, over 1,000 children under 5 were hospitalised by flu in England.

Most 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 infections like flu spread more easily in schools, high vaccination uptake among children can also help prevent the spread of infection in the wider community.

After vaccination, some children 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.

### **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
- your 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 can 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?**

Pregnant women are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated to protect themselves from flu. Flu infection increases the changes of pregnant women and their babies needing intensive care. Vaccination reduces the risk of serious complications like pneumonia if they catch flu during pregnancy. Vaccination in pregnancy also helps protect the baby who will continue to have some immunity to flu during the first few months of their life. 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 hospitalisation.

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.

Pregnant women shouldn't delay vaccination, especially those who are heavily pregnant, as babies born during the flu season need to be protected against flu as well the pregnant woman herself.

### **Flu and long-term health conditions**

#### **What about those with long-term health conditions?**

Individuals with certain long-term 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**

### **Who is eligible for COVID-19 vaccination?**

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has updated its [advice for the autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme](#), which has been accepted by ministers.

The focus of the programme is shifting towards targeted vaccination of those at highest risk of serious disease.

For autumn 2025, COVID-19 vaccination will be offered to:

- adults aged 75 years and over
- residents in care homes for older adults
- individuals who are immunosuppressed aged 6 months and over

This represents a change from the autumn 2024 programme, which also included adults aged 65 to 74 and all those aged 6 months and over in a clinical risk group.

The eligibility is the same across the 4 nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The vaccine should usually be offered no earlier than around 6 months after the last vaccine dose.

### **I was eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine last winter, why am I no longer eligible this winter?**

Thanks to the success of our vaccine programme, we have built a strong, broad immune defences against COVID-19 throughout the population.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice has continued to adapt as COVID-19 has changed from a pandemic threat to becoming a common milder infection.

The JCVI has updated its [advice for the autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme](#), which has been accepted by ministers. This represents a change from the autumn 2024 programme, which also included adults aged 65 to 74, all those aged 6 months and over in a clinical risk group, and pregnant women.

The focus of the programme is shifting towards targeted vaccination of those at highest risk of serious disease.

### **Will the vaccine protect me against the latest strain I've read about?**

It is normal for viruses to mutate and change over time. UKHSA is monitoring all available data relating to SARS-CoV-2 variants in the UK and abroad, and we continue to publish our findings in our regular [Flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

Based on the available information so far, there is no evidence to suggest that the newer variants [XFG and XFG.3 variants] cause more severe disease than previous variants, or that the vaccines in current use will be less effective against them.

### **Can you get a COVID-19 vaccine privately?**

As with other healthcare, whether a vaccination is available privately in the UK is a matter for manufacturers and private healthcare providers.

### **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. You will be offered the right vaccine for you. They have all met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

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

COVID-19 vaccines will reduce the chance of you becoming severely unwell this winter, but only provide modest protection against acquiring mild or asymptomatic illness from the current highly transmissible Omicron sub-variants.

It may take a few days for your body to build up some extra protection from the vaccine. Those aged below 75 years who are not immunosuppressed are at lower risk of severe COVID-19.

## **RSV**

### **What is RSV?**

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a major respiratory virus that is most common over the winter period, typically October to February. While the symptoms are mild for many, RSV accounts for around 30,000 hospitalisations of children under 5 in the UK annually, and for 20 to 30 infant deaths.

RSV can also be severe in older adults, causing pneumonia and flare-ups of existing lung disease and other long-term conditions. It causes around 9,000 hospitalisations in those aged over 75 in the UK each year.

### **Who is at risk?**

RSV can be especially dangerous for infants and the elderly.

Severe RSV is most common in infants under 1 year old. Babies are particularly vulnerable to RSV lung infections as they have small airways and have limited immunity against the virus. RSV infection in infants can cause a condition called bronchiolitis which is inflammation and blockage of the small air tubes in the lung.

Infants with severe bronchiolitis may need intensive care and the infection can be fatal.

### **Who is eligible for an RSV vaccine?**

Pregnant women at week 28 or later and everyone aged 75 to 79 will be offered a vaccine to protect themselves or their babies against RSV.

These vaccines will save lives and significantly reduce the burden on the NHS during the challenging winter months.

### **How can I protect my baby from RSV?**

The best way to protect babies against RSV infection is for the mother to have the vaccine during pregnancy.

Vaccination reduces the risk of severe RSV lung infection by around 70% in the first six months of life.

The vaccine boosts the pregnant woman's immune system to make antibodies that can fight RSV infection. These antibodies then pass through the placenta to help protect the baby from birth.

The vaccine is offered from week 28 of pregnancy, often by maternity services. If you haven't been offered the vaccine around the time of your 28-week antenatal appointment, contact your maternity service to make an appointment. Having the RSV vaccine in week 28 or

within a few weeks of this gives the best protection for the baby, including if they are born early.

Having the vaccine later in the pregnancy will still provide some protection from infection and reduce the risk of spreading infection to the newborn baby. If it wasn't possible to have a dose earlier, it can be given right up until you have the baby.

### **Is more than one dose of RSV vaccine needed?**

Pregnant women should have the RSV vaccine in every pregnancy – this will give your new baby the best protection.

In older adults, a single dose is expected to give good protection for a few years. A single dose of vaccine will help to boost protection as you reach an age group at highest risk of serious RSV infection.

### **How can I prevent the spread of RSV?**

RSV can spread through coughs and sneezes.

You can help to prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze (ideally with a tissue, or else into the bend of your elbow), and you can wash your hands with warm soapy water frequently to kill the germs.

If you have symptoms that could be RSV you should ideally try and avoid young babies, though this isn't going to be possible if you are a new parent. It is perfectly okay for parents to ask people with colds to keep away from newborn babies, particularly in the first few months, and for babies born prematurely.

Even with these measures it can be difficult to avoid RSV infection. Half of babies catch RSV in their first year and up to 90% of children are infected before they turn 2 years old.

# About the UK Health Security Agency

UKHSA is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents and other health threats. We provide intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage, to make the nation health secure.

[UKHSA](#) is an executive agency, sponsored by the [Department of Health and Social Care](#).

# About NHS England

[NHS England](#) provides national leadership and oversight for the health service - supporting and overseeing the commissioning of health services; allocating the budget to different parts of the NHS; commissioning certain services directly; and with specific oversight of providers of NHS services.

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency)

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Version 3.0

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Published: 16 September 2025 (first published 1 September 2025)



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