Influenza Vaccination

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DISEASE

1. What is influenza?

Influenza, more commonly known as the 'flu', is a viral infection caused by influenza viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs. Flu can cause fever, shivers, extreme tiredness, headaches, aching muscles and joints, dry cough and sore throat. It is highly infectious with symptoms that come on quickly. Because it is caused by viruses, and not bacteria, antibiotics won't treat it.

There are different types of influenza virus, but only types A and B are important in human disease. They cause seasonal outbreaks (epidemics) almost every winter in both the northern and southern hemispheres i.e. in the UK between October and May (peak in December and January) and in South Africa from May to August (peak in June and July).

2. Is flu the same as the common cold?

No. Common colds are caused by a different group of generally more mild viruses, not the influenza virus. Common colds usually affect only the nose and throat (e.g. runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes, throat irritation and headache). The symptoms come on gradually and only rarely cause a high fever or shivers/aches in the body. Common colds cannot generally cause a severe illness.

Infection with influenza can be very serious. While healthy individuals usually recover in 2 to 7 days, for some it may lead to a hospital stay, permanent disability or even death. The risk is highest among young children, older adults, people with an underlying health condition, and pregnant women. It is particularly important that these groups receive a vaccination.

3. Who is at greatest risk from influenza?

Anyone can catch flu, but for some people it may be more likely to lead to severe disease.

Children under 16 years are more than twice as likely to become infected with influenza than older age groups. While most healthy children will recover, very young children can become severely ill with influenza, requiring hospital admission or intensive care.

Older people, aged 65 years or more, have a greater risk of developing severe complications from influenza, such as pneumonia. This is because the immune response to the infection is less effective than in younger people. They may also be more likely to have underlying medical problems which also increases the risk of becoming severely ill.

Pregnant women also have a higher chance of developing complications due to changes in how the body responds to infection during pregnancy. Young babies also have a higher risk of getting seriously ill if they get the flu and cannot receive a vaccine until they are older.

4. How is influenza spread?

Flu is spread through the coughs and sneezes of an infectious person. People with flu are most infectious from when they start to feel unwell and for the next three days. Covering your mouth and nose – ideally with a tissue – and washing your hands frequently helps to prevent the spread.

It can also spread by direct contact with mucous membranes (i.e. the nose, mouth and throat) – for example on the hands of infectious people who have rubbed their noses. That is why hand hygiene and proper use of disposable handkerchiefs are so important.

5. How do I protect myself and my family against influenza?

The risk of catching influenza or passing it onto others can be reduced by taking the following measures:

- **Frequent handwashing**: reduces the risk of catching influenza and protects against several other infections
- **Proper respiratory hygiene**: covering the mouth and nose and using a disposable handkerchief or tissue when coughing or sneezing
- **Staying at home if unwell with a fever**: people infected with influenza are most infectious to other people during the early stages of the illness
- **Routine annual vaccination**: the vaccine offers good protection and people who are at high risk of infection should be vaccinated

6. If someone thinks they have influenza, what should they do?

Two things: 1. Look after yourself and 2. Do not infect others.

The best advice is to stay at home, use handkerchiefs properly (preferably disposable one – and dispose of them safely), wash their hands frequently, not to share towels, rest, drink plenty of fluids and take medicines to reduce the temperature and alleviate the aching – such as paracetamol. Consider wearing a disposable face mask if you must be around other people at home.

Most influenza illnesses are self-limiting and it is best to treat the infection at home. Advice from healthcare professionals should be sought if the illness lasts for more than about a week, or if symptoms become more severe, including:

- Difficulty breathing or severe shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- Confusion or dizziness
- Severe or repeated vomiting
- Children who are bluish or grey in colour
- Children who are not waking or interacting normally

Older adults, very young children, pregnant women and people with underlying medical conditions should seek help early.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VACCINE

7. Which influenza vaccine is being offered?

The specific vaccine being offered is the Cell-based Trivalent Influenza Vaccine (Surface Antigen, Inactivated) Seqirus – also referred to as IIVc.

This vaccine is used to prevent flu in adults and children older than 6 months of age. It is given by injection – usually into the upper arm. It protects against three different influenza viruses following recommendations made by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The vaccine is safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The vaccine is not a ‘live vaccine’ and is safe to give to people with weakened immune systems. The vaccine is egg-free and safe for people who have an egg allergy. None of the ingredients in the vaccine can cause flu.

8. How effective is the vaccine?

The flu vaccine is the best protection we have against this unpredictable virus. Its effectiveness varies from person-to-person, place-to-place, and year-to-year.

In England last winter, modelling indicated that the seasonal influenza vaccination programme prevented an estimated 104,000 hospital admissions and 7,100 deaths.

9. I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need another one this year?

Yes; the flu viruses can change from one winter to the next. Flu vaccines are updated for each season to give protection against the strains of flu that are most likely to be going around. For this reason, we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year. Also, protection from flu vaccination goes down with time so even if some of the strains are the same you should have a flu vaccine again each flu season.

10. I think I've already had flu, do I need a vaccination?

Yes; the vaccine will still help protect you. Other viruses can give you flu-like symptoms, or you may have had flu but because there is more than one type of flu virus you should still have the vaccine, even if you think you've had flu.

11. Can the flu vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes. A flu vaccine can be given at the same time as all routine vaccines. The vaccination can go ahead if you or your child has a minor illness such as a cold, but may be delayed for illnesses that include fever.

12. Is there anyone who shouldn't have the vaccination?

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but you should not be vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.

13. Is the influenza vaccine safe and are there side effects?

The flu vaccine has been around for decades. Millions of people receive the flu vaccine every year in the UK. It has an excellent safety profile.

The most reported side effects are:

- Pain, swelling, bruising, hardness, or redness at the injection site
- Slightly raised temperature
- Headache, aching joints or muscles
- Tiredness and feeling a little unwell

These symptoms disappear in a few days and are much milder than developing flu or complications associated with flu. Serious side effects are uncommon.

14. Can the influenza vaccine give me flu?

No. This vaccine is inactivated and cannot give you flu.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VACCINATION PROGRAMME

15. When and where will the vaccine be offered?

The vaccines are due to arrive on the Island in late October, and we aim to deliver all vaccinations in November ahead of the peak of the flu season.

A timetable of community vaccination clinics, as well as other opportunities to receive the vaccine, will be released as soon as the vaccines arrive on the island.

School-aged children will be offered their vaccination in school. These vaccinations will be coordinated by one of the 0-19 nurses who may be supported by 1-2 members of the community nursing team.

The team will also visit all residential care facilities and home visits can be arranged on request for those who cannot travel (call Tel: 25949).

16. Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

No. The vaccine is being offered for free to all eligible people.

17. Who is being offered the influenza vaccine?

The vaccine will be offered to all consenting persons in accordance with eligibility in the United Kingdom for the seasonal influenza programme. For the 2026/27, this includes:

- All adults aged 65 years and over
- All children aged at least 2 years and less than 17 years
- People aged 6 months or more with an underlying condition
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy
- People in long-stay residential facilities
- Household contacts of people with weakened immune systems
- Carers of elderly or disabled persons
- Frontline health and social care workers

18. Why do people aged 65 years and older need the influenza vaccine?

People 65 years and older are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications compared with young, healthy adults. This increased risk is due in part to changes in immune defences with increasing age.

While flu seasons vary in severity, during most seasons, people 65 years and older bear the greatest burden of severe flu disease. In England, greater than 90% of all influenza-related deaths occurring in hospital are in those aged 65 years or more.

19. Why do children need the influenza vaccine?

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness in children. Children under the age of 5 years have one of the highest rates of hospital admissions due to flu. Complications of flu include acute bronchitis, painful ear infections, and pneumonia. Some children may need to go to hospital for treatment, including intensive care. Flu can be deadly among young or vulnerable children; there have been a small number of deaths attributed to flu in the UK in the last few years.

It will also reduce the chance of others in your family, who could be at greater risk from flu, such as grandparents or those with long term health conditions, getting flu from your child. It can help you avoid having to take time off work, or other activities, to look after your sick child or if you become sick yourself.

20. Why do people with underlying conditions need the influenza vaccine?

People with underlying conditions (otherwise known as people in clinical risk groups) have a greater than ten times increased risk of death from influenza than people who are not in any risk group.

Underlying conditions include diabetes, obesity, immunosuppression, and chronic renal, heart, respiratory, neurological or liver disease.

21. Why do pregnant women need the influenza vaccine?

Pregnancy alters how the body handles infections such as flu. Flu infection increases the chances of pregnant women and their babies needing intensive care. All pregnant women should have a flu vaccine to protect themselves and their babies. You can have the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy, from conception onwards.

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 the baby being stillborn or premature
- help protect their baby who will continue to have some immunity to flu during the first few months of its life
- reduce the chance of the mother passing infection to her new baby

22. Why do healthcare professionals, household contacts of people with immunosuppression, and carers of elderly or disabled people need the influenza vaccine?

There are three main reasons.

Firstly, the influenza vaccine helps protect the individual from becoming unwell and can reduce the risk of severe symptoms.

Secondly, it helps protect vulnerable patients and members of the community by reducing the risk of passing the infection on to others.

Thirdly, vaccination helps maintain continuity of care and essential services by reducing staff sickness during peak flu season. This helps ensure that vulnerable people continue to receive the vital care and support they need.