This leaflet explains how you can help protect yourself and your children against flu this coming winter, and why it’s very important that people who are at increased risk from flu have their free flu vaccination every year.

What is flu? Isn’t it just a heavy cold? How will I know I’ve got it?

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 two to seven days, but for some the disease can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

What causes flu?

Flu is caused by influenza viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs. And because it’s caused by viruses and not bacteria, antibiotics won’t treat it. If, however, there are complications from getting flu, antibiotics may be needed.

How do you catch flu? Can I avoid it?

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, they spread the flu virus in tiny droplets of saliva over a wide area. These droplets can then be breathed in by other people or they can be picked up by touching surfaces where the droplets have landed. You can prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and you can wash your hands frequently or use hand gels to reduce the risk of picking up the virus.

But the best way to avoid catching and spreading flu is by having the vaccination before the flu season starts.

Other Headings in Leaflet

How do we protect against flu?

What harm can flu do?

Am I at increased risk from the effects of flu?

Who should consider a flu vaccination?

Flu vaccination for pregnant women

Do I need another vaccination this year?

I think I’ve already had flu, do I need a vaccination?

What about my children?

Can my child have the flu vaccine with other vaccines?

Should anyone not have the vaccination?

Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatine derived from pigs?

Will I get any side effects?

Will the flu vaccine protect me completely?

How long will I be protected for?

What do I need to do now?

For further information see: www.nhs.uk/vaccinations