FLU VACCINATION

Who needs it?
Why?
When?
What is flu?
Flu is an illness caused by a virus. It is spread by the coughs and sneezes of people who are already infected. Flu viruses are always changing, so this winter’s flu will be slightly different from last winter’s. In a bad year a lot of people may be infected at the same time. This is called an epidemic. Flu epidemics are difficult to predict. They usually last a few weeks.

How serious is flu?
Flu is worse than an ordinary cold. For most people it is just a nasty experience, but for some it can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia. These illnesses may need treatment in hospital.

Who needs a flu vaccination?
You need a flu vaccination if you have:

- a chronic heart or chest complaint including asthma
- chronic kidney disease
- diabetes
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment
- any other serious medical condition – check with your doctor if you are unsure.

This applies whatever your age. If in doubt ask your doctor.

Vaccination is also recommended for anyone over 75 years old and for people living in places where there is a high risk of flu spreading quickly such as old people’s homes.

**Why shouldn’t everyone have a flu vaccination?**

Healthy people don’t need to be vaccinated:
- flu isn’t a serious risk for them
- the occasional bout of flu gives better long term protection than a vaccination.
How is the vaccine made?
Flu vaccine normally contains ingredients from three different kinds of flu virus. The viruses are grown in hens' eggs, then killed and purified before being made into the vaccine. New vaccines are prepared each year to protect against the kinds of flu virus expected that year. We are getting better at predicting which kinds of flu need to be covered.

How does the vaccine work?
About a week to ten days after vaccination, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses with which you then come into contact. This protection lasts about a year.

How effective is the vaccine?
Flu vaccinations are pretty effective:

- most people who have been vaccinated don’t get the kinds of flu from which the vaccine was made

- if you do catch flu it is likely to be milder than if you had not been vaccinated.
However a flu vaccination doesn't protect you against other viruses which are often around at the same time as flu and may have similar symptoms.

**Does the vaccine have any side effects?**

Flu vaccines are very safe. They may cause some soreness where you were injected and, less often, a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days.

**Can the vaccine cause flu?**

No. The vaccine cannot cause flu because it doesn't contain any live virus.

**Is there anyone who should not be vaccinated?**

You should not be vaccinated if you have a serious allergy to hens' eggs. It is generally not advised if you are pregnant. If in doubt ask your doctor.
When is the best time to be vaccinated?

The best time to be vaccinated is between late September and early November, ready for the winter. You shouldn’t wait until there is a flu epidemic.

How do I go about getting vaccinated?

If you think you need a flu vaccination, check with your doctor or the practice nurse – or if a nurse visits you regularly, ask them. Try to do so before October. Most doctors organise special vaccination sessions in the autumn and will arrange an appointment for you then.