IF YOU KNEW ABOUT FLU YOU’D GET THE JAB
Anyone can get flu but it can be more serious for people aged 65 years or over and people of any age (including children over 6 months of age) with a serious medical condition, particularly those with serious heart or respiratory disease. You may also be at an increased risk if you have diabetes that requires medication, have serious kidney or liver disease or if you have lowered immunity due to disease or treatment.

If you fall into one of these groups, you are more vulnerable to the effects of flu (even if you feel fit and healthy) and
could develop more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, potentially putting you in hospital. It could also make any existing condition worse.

That's why it pays to get your flu jab in the autumn before flu starts to circulate. Because the virus constantly mutates, it’s necessary to get the jab every year, to protect you against the latest strains of the virus.

So make an appointment with your GP today. The flu jab is free and available between September and early November.
How do I know when I’ve got flu?

Flu symptoms hit you suddenly and severely. They usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, and you can often get a cough and sore throat at the same time.

Don’t wait until there’s an epidemic: contact your GP or practice nurse and get your flu jab this autumn before the virus appears in the winter.

Who needs a flu jab?
Ask your GP about having a flu (influenza) vaccination if:

- you’re 65 or over
- or if you have any of these problems (however old you are):
  - a serious heart or chest complaint, including asthma
  - serious kidney disease
  - diabetes
  - lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment

Your GP may also advise you to have the flu jab if you have serious liver disease.
If you live in a residential care home, talk to your nurse or the manager.

If you are the main carer for older or disabled people then you should ensure that they are vaccinated (if recommended) and also seek advice from your GP as to whether you should be vaccinated so that you can continue to look after them.

Isn't flu just a heavy cold?

No. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a sore throat and stuffy or runny nose.

How serious is flu?

Catching flu is a nasty experience for most people. But it can also lead to really serious illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia, which may mean you need hospital treatment. A lot of people, mainly older people, die from flu every winter.

How do I catch flu?

Flu is a highly infectious illness, which spreads very rapidly by coughs and sneezes from people who are already carrying the virus.

When am I most at risk from flu?

Flu reappears every winter, usually over a short period of a few weeks, so a lot of people get ill around the same time. In a really bad year, this can amount to an epidemic, but it's impossible to predict how much flu there'll be every year.

If I had the jab last year, do I need it again now?

Yes. The viruses that cause flu change every year, which means the flu this winter will be different from last winter's, and the vaccine will be different as well.

Why shouldn't everyone have a flu jab?

For most people, flu is nasty but not usually serious. The vaccine is offered only to people who are at high risk from the serious complications of flu.

How long will the jab protect me?

The vaccine provides protection for about a year.
How does the vaccine work?
Your body starts making antibodies to the vaccine virus about a week to ten days after the injection. The antibodies help protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with.

Will it stop me from getting ill?
Flu vaccinations only protect against flu: they won’t stop you catching the many other viruses that appear every winter. But because flu is generally more serious, it makes sense to have a flu jab.

Can the flu jab actually cause flu?
No. The vaccine doesn’t contain any live virus, so it can’t cause flu.

Will there be any side effects?
Side effects should be expected. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected, but that’s about all. Any other reactions are very rare.

How effective is the vaccine?
No vaccine is 100% effective. Most people who’ve been vaccinated will not get the flu. If you do catch flu, it’s likely to be milder than if you hadn’t been vaccinated.

When are flu vaccines given?
The best time is between September and early November, ready for the winter. Don’t wait until there’s a flu epidemic.
Is there anyone who shouldn’t get a flu jab?
If you have a serious allergy to hens’ eggs, you shouldn’t get vaccinated. If in doubt, ask your doctor. And you shouldn’t have the vaccine if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction to the flu vaccine, or to any of its ingredients, which needed urgent medical treatment. If you’re not sure please ask your doctor for advice.

Can I have the flu vaccine if I am pregnant?
Yes. If you are in one of the risk groups mentioned above, talk to your GP about this. No problems have been reported in giving the vaccine to pregnant women.

How do I go about getting immunised?
If you think you need a flu vaccination, check with your doctor or the practice nurse – or if a nurse visits you regularly, you can ask them. Alternatively, ask your local pharmacist. Most doctors organise special vaccination sessions in the autumn.

Are you aged 65 or over?
Ask your GP whether you need the pneumo jab to protect you against serious forms of pneumococcal infection. It is available for everyone aged 65 years or over and for younger people with certain serious medical conditions. You won’t need it each year – for most it is a one-off vaccination. It is OK to have the pneumo jab at the same time as your flu jab.