Why should children have the flu vaccine?
Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can often last several days.

Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

Are all children being offered the vaccine?
No. Last year, all children aged two, three and four years and school children in some areas were vaccinated. This year, we are extending the programme to include all children in school years 1 and 2. In future, the programme will move up through the school years.

Why are so many children being offered the vaccine?
By offering the flu vaccination to as many children as possible, we help to protect them in time for the winter. As well as protecting these vaccinated children, the disease is less able to spread as easily, and so they also help to protect their younger brothers and sisters, and other family members including their parents and grandparents.

My child had the flu vaccination last year. Do they need another one this year?
Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against strains of flu that may be different from last year. For this reason we recommend that even if vaccinated last year, your child should be vaccinated again this year.

How effective is the vaccine?
Because the flu virus can change from year to year there is always a risk that the vaccine does not match the circulating virus. During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains although last year it was not.

Has the nasal vaccine been used in other countries?
Yes; it has been used safely in the US for many years and it was used in the previous two flu seasons in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?
Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness. It may also reduce the chance of others in your family getting flu from your child. It can help you avoid having to take time off work or other activities because you are ill or need to look after your sick child.

Over the past two years the programme has been tested in a number of areas. In those areas less flu has been detected in all age groups of the population. This suggests that as well as protecting the vaccinated children other people benefited too.

How will the vaccine be given?
For most children, it is given as a nasal spray.