About flu jabs
Who should get a flu jab this autumn?
This booklet is about who should get a flu jab and why.

There are some difficult words in this booklet. These words are in blue in the booklet. There is a list of what the words mean on page 15.

You may like to have someone to support you when you look at this booklet.
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What is flu?

Some people think that flu is a sort of cold. They are wrong!

**Flu** is the short name for an illness called **influenza**.

Influenza is caused by a **virus**. A virus is a sort of germ which makes people ill.

Flu can make you very ill, but you can have a **flu jab** to help stop you catching flu. **Jab** is another word for injection.
Who gets flu?

Anyone can get flu but it can be more serious for:

- people who are 65 or older

- children who are 6 months or older who have a serious illness that will last a long time

- people of any age who have a serious illness that will last a long time, especially people who have:
  - a serious heart problem
  - a serious breathing problem like asthma
  - diabetes
  - a serious kidney problem
  - have a serious liver disease
  - had a stroke or TIA. (TIA is short for transient ischaemic attack. It is a sort of less serious or mini stroke)
  - a weak immune system. (Your immune system is the part of your body that fights off illness and keeps you well.)
Flu can make you more likely to get more serious illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia. These are illnesses which affect your lungs.

Flu can also make worse any illness you already have. You might need to go to hospital because of flu.

The flu jab is free. Ask your doctor or practice nurse about getting your jab in the autumn before people start catching flu.
Who needs a flu jab?

Because the virus changes all the time, you should get a **flu jab** every year to help protect you against the new types of the virus.

People who are ill and older people

You should ask your doctor or practice nurse about having a flu jab if you:

- have a serious heart problem
- have a serious chest problem like asthma
- have diabetes
- have a serious kidney problem
- have a serious liver disease
- have a weak immune system because you are ill or because of some sorts of medicines
- have had a stroke or **TIA**
- are 65 or older.
Your doctor may also say you should have the **flu jab** if you have:

- multiple sclerosis (or MS for short, an illness of the nervous system)
- other problems with your nervous system.

**People in care homes**

If you live in a care home, you should ask your nurse or the manager of the home about getting a flu jab.

**Carers**

If you are a carer for an older or disabled person, you should ask your doctor if you need a flu jab. This is because the person you care for could be at risk if you catch **flu**.
How will I know if I have got flu?

Flu symptoms start quickly and are usually quite bad. Symptoms are the signs that tell you that you are ill. Flu symptoms are usually:

- fever
- chills
- headaches
- aching muscles.
You might also get a cough and sore throat if you have got flu.

The pneumo jab

There is another jab for people aged 65 or older and for some younger people with serious illnesses. This jab helps protect against serious cases of pneumonia. This is called a pneumo jab.

Most people only need one pneumo jab in their life. So you will probably not need a pneumo jab more than once.

It is OK to have the pneumo jab at the same time as your flu jab.

Ask your doctor or practice nurse if you need a pneumo jab as well as your flu jab.
Questions and answers about flu

Is flu just a sort of bad cold?
No. Colds are not so serious and usually start slowly with a sore throat and stuffy or runny nose.

How serious is flu?
Flu is nasty for most people. But it can also lead to serious illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia, which may mean you need to go into hospital.

A lot of people, mainly older people, die from flu every winter.

How do I catch flu?
Flu is very easy to catch. It is spread quickly by coughs and sneezes from people who already have flu.

When am I most at risk from flu?
Flu happens every winter. People usually get flu about the same time, so you are most at risk when a lot of other people already have flu.
I had a flu jab last year, do I need another jab this year?

Yes. Flu viruses change every year. This means flu this winter will be different from flu last winter. So the virus in the jab has to be different too.

Should everyone have a flu jab?

No. For most people, flu is nasty but not serious. The flu jab is for people who are at risk from the other problems that flu can cause.

How long will the jab protect me?

For about 1 year.

How does the flu jab work?

The flu jab contains parts of a killed flu virus that does not do you any harm. After the jab your body starts making chemicals called antibodies to fight the virus in the jab.

This means that if you come in contact with a real flu virus your body already has the right antibodies to fight the virus.
Will a flu jab stop me getting ill?
Flu jabs only protect against flu. Flu jabs will not stop you catching the many other sorts of viruses.

But because flu can be serious, it makes sense to have a flu jab.

Can the flu jab give me flu?
No. The flu jab cannot give you flu.

Will there be any side effects?
You might have some side effects. For a few days you may have:

- a slight temperature
- aching muscles
Another side effect you might have is:

- a sore arm

But you are not likely to have any worse side effects.

How good is the jab at stopping flu?

The **flu jab** does not stop everyone getting **flu**. The **jab** gives good protection against **flu viruses** that are very like the harmless viruses in the **jab**. So most people who have had a flu jab do not get flu.

If you do get flu, it is likely to be not so bad if you have had a flu jab.

When can I get a flu jab?

You can get a flu jab during the autumn. This is usually before flu is around.
Should anyone not get a flu jab?

You should not get a flu jab if:

- You cannot eat hens’ eggs because they make you very ill.
- You have ever been very ill because of a flu jab.
- You have ever been very ill because of any of the chemicals in the flu jab.

If you are not sure about any of these things, ask your doctor.

Can I have the flu jab if I am pregnant?

Yes. We have not found any problems for pregnant women.

If you are pregnant and you have any of the problems in the list on page 5, you should ask your doctor about having a flu jab.
How do I get a flu jab?

Most doctors have special times in the autumn when they give people flu jabs.

If you think you need a flu jab, you should ask:

- your doctor

- a practice nurse

- a nurse who visits you regularly

- your local chemist or pharmacy.
What the words mean

| **antibodies** | Chemicals that your body makes to fight **viruses** and help keep you well |
| **bronchitis** | An illness of the lungs |
| **flu** | The illness caused by the **flu virus**. Flu is short for **influenza** |
| **flu jab** | An injection of a harmless **virus** which helps your body to fight off real **flu viruses** |
| **flu symptoms** | The signs that tell you that you have **flu** |
| **flu virus** | The chemical that causes **flu** |
| **immune system** | The part of your body that fights off illness and keeps you well |
| **influenza** | The proper name for **flu** |
| **jab** | An injection |
| **pneumo jab** | A special **jab** for people aged 65 or older and some younger people with serious illnesses |
| **pneumonia** | An illness of the lungs |
| **symptoms** | The signs that tell you that you are ill |
| **TIA** | TIA is short for transient ischaemic attack. It is a sort of less serious or mini stroke |
| **virus** | A sort of chemical that makes people ill |

How to find out more

If you want to find out more about flu and the flu jab:
Visit our website: [www.nhs.uk/flu](http://www.nhs.uk/flu)