

Flu and COVID-19 Winter Vaccination Programme

Information for Healthcare Workers



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

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Flu and COVID-19 Vaccines 2024-2025 Winter Vaccination Programme

Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are serious viral infections that can be life-threatening.

By getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, you protect yourself, and you also prevent the spread of flu and COVID-19 to people around you.

Please read carefully.

As infection with both flu and COVID-19 could be fatal for your patients, it's especially important to get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines to stop the spread of both flu and COVID-19.

You can save lives by getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines.

What are seasonal influenza (flu) and COVID-19?

Flu and COVID-19 are both very infectious viral illnesses. Most people with flu or COVID-19 have symptoms such as a high temperature, sore throat, muscle pains, fatigue and headache.

Flu and COVID-19 can both cause serious illness which may be life-threatening. Every year in Ireland 200-500 people die from flu and thousands of people need admission to hospital. In Winter 2023/2024, in Ireland, there were over 5000 COVID-19 hospitalisations and almost 3000 Influenza hospitalisations in adult patients.

What are the complications of flu and COVID-19?

Anyone can get sick with flu or COVID-19 and serious complications can happen at any age.

Severe disease and death is most likely in people with chronic medical conditions, during pregnancy and among older people.

Complications of flu include bronchitis, pneumonia, and rarely acute encephalitis.

Complications of COVID-19 include pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome and encephalitis.

Other long term effects can include long COVID and there may be an increased risk of renal and cardiovascular disorders associated with prior COVID-19 infection.

Flu and COVID-19 infections can also worsen existing medical conditions such as heart disease.

Flu and COVID-19 infections during pregnancy can cause severe illness and increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and stillbirth.

How are flu and COVID-19 spread?

Flu and COVID-19 are spread by coughing and sneezing.

Flu and COVID-19 can also spread by touching a surface or object that has virus on it and then touching your mouth and nose.

Anyone with flu can be infectious from 1–2 days before to 3–5 days after symptoms start. Anyone with COVID-19 can be infectious from 2 days before up to 10 days after symptoms start. **This means that you can pass on flu or COVID-19 to a vulnerable patient even before you know that you are sick.**

Some people with flu or COVID-19 do not have any symptoms but they can still spread infection to others.

If you have symptoms of flu or COVID-19 please stay at home. Do not go to work or visit hospitals, residential care facilities or vulnerable people. Contact your GP (Doctor).

Why do I need the flu and COVID-19 vaccines if I am healthy?

You are working in a healthcare environment, so your risk of getting flu and COVID-19 is much higher - it's 10 times higher than for the general public. This means that your risk of spreading flu and COVID-19 to others is also much higher.

Patients with weak immune systems may not get sufficient protection from the COVID-19 or flu vaccines and elderly patients may not get sufficient protection from the flu vaccine themselves so they rely on you to keep them safe.

Why do I need the flu vaccine every year?

Each year the circulating flu viruses change, so each year the composition of the flu vaccine changes to provide protection from the new strains of flu virus expected. The flu vaccine protects against 4 strains of flu virus.

Why do I need another COVID-19 booster vaccine?

It is important to keep up-to-date with your COVID-19 vaccines, even if you are already vaccinated or you have had COVID-19. This is because the protection you got from your previous COVID-19 vaccine or COVID-19 infection gradually wane over time, so you need a COVID-19 booster to restore protection. The COVID-19 booster vaccine, will provide the best protection against circulating COVID-19 variants.

How long does it take the vaccines to work?

The flu vaccine starts to work within two weeks and the COVID-19 vaccine starts to work within a few weeks.

How safe are the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are very safe. Flu vaccines have been given for more than 60 years to millions of people worldwide.

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are very safe and have also been given to millions of people. No new safety concerns have arisen since the introduction of the new monovalent XBB.1.5 adapted vaccines in Autumn 2023. It is expected that the safety of the antigenically updated vaccines will be similar to the previous vaccines. The European Medicines Agency continually monitors COVID-19 vaccines.

Who should be vaccinated?

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for all healthcare workers including:

- Medical, nursing and paramedical staff
- Medical, nursing and paramedical students
- Allied health professionals and students
- All GP practice staff
- Dental personnel
- Hospital porters and cleaners
- General support staff
- Ambulance personnel
- Staff in disability and social care services especially those in residential settings
- Healthcare administrative staff
- Carers
- Any other healthcare staff who have contact with patients

What vaccines are available for the Winter Vaccination Programme?

The 2024-2025 HSE Winter vaccination programme will offer the following vaccines for adults:

Flu Vaccines:

- Influvac Tetra, supplied by Viatris or Quadrivalent influenza vaccine (split virion, inactivated), supplied by Sanofi

COVID-19 vaccines

- Latest updated Comirnaty mRNA COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by Pfizer
- Latest updated Nuvaxovid COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by Novavax (for those who cannot receive or would prefer not to receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine)

Should pregnant healthcare workers be vaccinated?

Yes. Seasonal flu vaccine and a COVID-19 booster vaccine are recommended for pregnant women. This is because they are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes and severe complications due to flu. Flu and COVID-19 in pregnancy can also cause premature birth, miscarriage and stillbirth.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines protect pregnant women during pregnancy and provide ongoing protection to their newborn baby during their first few months of life.

If you are pregnant please read the HSE flu leaflet for pregnant women.

Is there anyone who cannot get the flu vaccine?

Most people can get the flu vaccine.

It is not recommended for those who have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any of its ingredients.

You should not receive any flu vaccine if you have severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell); except for those with primary autoimmune neutropenia.

People on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab), should speak to their treating specialist doctor before getting the flu vaccine, because of a potentially increased incidence of immune-related adverse reactions.

Is there anyone who cannot get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Most people can get the COVID-19 vaccine.

It is not recommended for those who have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

It is not recommended for those who have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to polyethylene glycol (PEG).

It is not recommended for those who have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to trometamol.

If you have had anaphylaxis after multiple different drug classes or unexplained anaphylaxis, you will need to consult with an Immunologist.

If you have had a previous history of myocarditis after any COVID-19 vaccine, you will need to consult with a Cardiologist.

If you have had a recent MPOX vaccine, you need to wait at least a 4 week interval before receiving a subsequent COVID-19 vaccine.

What about people with egg allergy?

The COVID-19 mRNA vaccine can be given to people with an egg allergy. Most people with an egg allergy can have a flu vaccine. Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

When should you delay getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?

You may have to delay getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines if you are unwell – with a high temperature of more than 38°C – until you are better. You need to wait an interval of ideally 6 months, but at least 3 months, since your last COVID-19 infection or COVID-19 vaccine, before you can get a COVID-19 booster.

Can the vaccines give me the flu or COVID-19?

No. The vaccines do not contain any live viruses and cannot cause flu or COVID-19 infection.

Do I need both flu and COVID-19 vaccines?

Yes. It is important to get both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine. This is because Flu and COVID-19 are caused by different viruses.

Flu and COVID-19 can both cause serious illness and if you get them you might need to be admitted to hospital. It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from the symptoms of COVID-19.

You can get a COVID-19 and flu vaccine at the same time if it is offered to you. If you have had a prior COVID-19 vaccine you can still get the flu vaccine. If you have had a prior flu vaccine you can still get the COVID-19 vaccine.

What can I expect following vaccination?

The most common side effects are mild and may include soreness, redness or swelling where the injection was given. Headache, fever, aches, tiredness and diarrhoea may also occur.

There may be a slight increase in short term mild adverse events after co-administration of a COVID-19 vaccine and a seasonal influenza vaccine. These include pain at the site of injection, fatigue, headache, and myalgia

Remember if you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reason - don't assume it's the flu or COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have a temperature, stay at home and ring your GP (Doctor) for medical advice.

Where do I get vaccinated?

Contact your peer vaccinator, line manager or flu lead.

You can also get the flu vaccine free of charge from your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

For more information see:

www.hse.ie/flu

You can also find a link to the patient information leaflet for the vaccines at **www.hpra.ie**.

Privacy Statement: In order to administer vaccine(s) safely, and to record all of the necessary data for monitoring and managing vaccine(s), the HSE will be processing your personal data. All data processed by the HSE will be in accordance with the various data protection legislation including the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018, the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR), and the Health Identifiers Act 2014. The processing of your data will be lawful and fair. It will only be processed for specific purposes including, to manage the vaccinations, to report and monitor vaccination programmes, to validate clients and provide health care. Data sharing between HSE departments may also occur.

National Immunisation Office

www.hse.ie/flu

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