

Flu Vaccine for Children aged 2-17 2024/25



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Flu Vaccine for children aged 2-17

This flu season 2024/25, all children aged 2-17 years will be offered the flu vaccine free of charge.

This leaflet explains why it is important that children get the flu vaccine. It tells you where your child can get the flu vaccine and important information about the vaccine.

Please read carefully.

What is flu?

Influenza (flu) is a very infectious illness caused by the flu virus. Flu spreads easily and infects both children and adults.

Flu circulates in the community during the flu season. The flu season usually starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

How does flu affect children?

Children are more likely than adults to get severe complications of flu.

Children who are sick with flu miss days in crèche, childcare and school. They also miss out on their usual activities such as hobbies and sports.

Over the last 10 years in Ireland:

- Almost **5000** children were hospitalised because of flu
- Almost **200** needed intensive care (ICU)
- Sadly **40** children died

Can flu cause serious illness in children?

Yes. Complications of flu include pneumonia, bronchitis, and, on rare occasions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

Children with chronic health conditions are most at risk of the serious complications of flu.

How will the flu vaccine protect my child?

The flu vaccine helps your child's immune system to produce antibodies (proteins that fight infection).

If your child has had the flu vaccine and they come into contact with the flu virus, the vaccine can stop them from getting sick.

If my child gets the flu vaccine, are other people protected?

If your child gets the flu vaccine, it reduces the spread of flu to others. This helps protect people around them from flu, for example their brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents.

If enough children are vaccinated fewer people will need treatment in hospital. This is very important for our health services especially during the winter.

What is the name of the flu vaccine for children?

The flu vaccine for children is called Fluenz manufactured by AstraZeneca.

The flu vaccine for children has been given to children in the US since 2003 and in the UK since 2013 and Ireland since 2020.

How is the vaccine given?

Your vaccinator will give the vaccine as a spray up your child's nose (nasal vaccine). They will spray once in each nostril. There is no need for an injection and it's pain free.

Your child can breathe normally while getting the vaccine. There is no need to take a deep breath or sniff.

Some children who have chronic health conditions like chronic heart or lung conditions may need two doses, given four weeks apart.

Are there any children who should not get the nasal flu vaccine?

A very small number of children will not be able to get the nasal flu vaccine because of medical reasons.

Children or young persons should **not** get the vaccine if they:

- have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the flu vaccine or any of its ingredients
- have severe asthma or if they have been wheezy or needed their inhaler more than usual in the three days before the vaccination
- are taking medicines called salicylates, which include Aspirin

- have a severely weakened immune system because of certain medical conditions or treatments
- are living with someone who has a severely weakened immune system (for example, a person who recently had a bone marrow transplant)
- are taking two medicines called combination checkpoint inhibitors (for example, ipilimumab plus nivolumab) which are used to treat cancer
- have severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell) except for those with primary autoimmune neutropenia
- have taken antiviral medication for flu within the previous 48 hours
- have a condition which means they have a leak of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) - the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord
- are pregnant.

Talk to your doctor before getting the nasal flu vaccine for your child if they have had a cochlear implant.

If your child cannot get the flu vaccine using a nasal spray (nose spray), your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist will talk to you about giving your child a different flu vaccine, which is given by injection.

Can the nasal flu vaccine give you the flu?

No. The nasal flu vaccine will not give your child the flu.

Are there any side effects of the nasal flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is a very safe vaccine.

The most common side effects are mild. They include a runny or blocked nose, headache and muscle aches. Some children get a fever (temperature) after the vaccine, but it is usually mild and goes away on its own.

Serious side effects such as a severe allergic reaction are very rare.

What if my child doesn't feel well after vaccination?

If your child has a fever (temperature) or a headache, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen. Do not give Aspirin or medicines called salicylates to children, unless they have been prescribed by a doctor. This is especially important in the 4 weeks after getting the vaccine.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist if your child is very unwell after the vaccine, as it may be for some other reason.

My child is allergic to eggs. Can they get the nasal flu vaccine?

Yes. Most children with an egg allergy can have a flu vaccine. Talk to your GP (Doctor), pharmacist or vaccinator.

My child has asthma. Can they get the nasal flu vaccine?

Yes. Most children with asthma can get the flu vaccine.

Your child should not get the nasal flu vaccine if they have severe asthma or if they have been wheezy or needed their inhaler more than usual in the 3 days before the vaccination.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

My child is under 2 years of age; can they get the nasal flu vaccine?

No. The nasal flu vaccine can only be given to children from their second birthday.

If your child has a chronic health condition which means that they are at risk from flu, they can get a different flu vaccine which is given by injection.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

My child is 18 years or older; can they get the nasal flu vaccine?

No. If your child has a chronic health condition which means that they are at higher risk from flu, they can get a different flu vaccine which is given by injection.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist

Will the flu vaccine protect my child against COVID-19?

No. The flu vaccine doesn't protect against COVID-19. 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 your child gets them they might need to be admitted to hospital. It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from the symptoms of COVID-19.

If they have had the COVID-19 vaccine they should still get the flu vaccine.

Children aged 5 years and over can get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine if it is offered to them.

For children 6 months to 4 years other vaccines should be separated from COVID-19 vaccines in this age group by 14 days.

Where can I get the nasal flu vaccine for my child?

You can get the nasal flu vaccine from your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

Some children may be offered the nasal flu vaccine in school.

What does the nasal flu vaccine cost?

If your child is aged 2-17 years, the vaccine and the consultation with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist are free.

For more information see:

www.hse.ie/flu

You can also find a link to the patient information leaflet for the vaccine at **www.hpra.ie**. Search for Fluenz to read the relevant patient information leaflet.

National Immunisation Office
www.hse.ie/flu
Order Code: HNI01369
August 2024

