

Patient Information Leaflet on the Flu Vaccine for Parents of Children with a Diagnosis of Cancer who are receiving Cancer Treatment

Should my child get the flu vaccine?

All children, adolescents and young adults, aged from 6 months to 18 years, with a diagnosis of cancer should have the flu vaccine, unless they fall into one of the groups listed at the bottom of this page.

Children are more likely than adults to get severe complications of flu, like pneumonia and bronchitis. Children with cancer have an even higher risk of serious complications from flu. They may need to go to hospital for treatment. Some may even need treatment in the intensive care unit. The flu vaccine will help protect your child against flu and reduce the spread of flu to others.

How is the flu vaccine given to children?

If your child is over 2 years old, the vaccine is usually given as a single spray in each nostril of your child's nose. The vaccine is not painful and is absorbed quickly.

Most children need only 1 dose of the vaccine each year. Children with chronic health conditions like cancer may need 2 doses. The doses are given 4 weeks apart.

If your child is 6 months to 2 years of age, they'll be offered a flu vaccine injection. This is because the nasal spray is not licensed for children under the age of 2. Older children who cannot have the nasal spray may also be given the flu vaccine injection.

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

Your child should **NOT get the nasal flu vaccine** if they:

- have a severely weakened immune system because of certain medical conditions or treatments. **If your child has leukaemia or lymphoma or is on cancer treatment, you should talk to their doctor first. They might be given the flu vaccine by injection instead.** Children on chemotherapy, or who have finished it in the last 6 months, and children who have had a bone marrow transplant in the last 2 years, should not get the nasal flu vaccine. They can usually have the flu vaccine by injection instead.
- 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 3 days before the vaccination. Severe asthma means your child takes steroid tablets every day or has required care in the ICU for their asthma in the past.

- **are taking medicines called salicylates, which include aspirin**
- are living with someone who has a severely weakened immune system - for example, a person who has to live in isolation in the months following a bone marrow transplant
- have a condition which means they have a leak of the CSF (the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord)
- your child also may not be able to have the nasal flu vaccine if they have had a cochlear implant. The advice of the specialist looking after your child will be needed to see if your child can have the nasal flu vaccine.

If your child cannot have the nasal flu vaccine, you should speak to your doctor about getting the vaccine as an injection.

Will the flu vaccine give my child the flu?

The nasal flu vaccine contains a weakened form of the flu virus, so it cannot give your child the flu. The flu vaccine given by injection doesn't contain a live flu virus, so it also cannot give your child the flu.

Is it safe to go to your GP (doctor) or pharmacist to get the flu vaccine during COVID-19?

Yes. GPs (doctors) and pharmacists follow HSE COVID-19 guidance to prevent transmission of infection and to keep you safe when you visit them.

What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?

Side effects may include a runny or blocked nose, headache, muscle aches and a slight fever.

Should my family have the flu vaccine?

Yes. Everyone in the household should have the flu vaccine, if it is not contra-indicated for them. Carers who come in from outside your home to look after your child should also get the flu vaccine.

Siblings of children who are undergoing a bone marrow transplant, or who have had a bone marrow transplant in the last 2 years, should not get the nasal flu vaccine. They should get the flu vaccine injection instead. Siblings of all other children with cancer can have the nasal flu vaccine.

More information on flu vaccination is available at [hse.ie/flu](https://www.hse.ie/flu) and <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/flu-vaccination/about-the-vaccine/>