

Information for headteachers and other school staff

Immunising primary school children against flu



This information is for headteachers and school staff to answer the most frequently asked questions regarding the nasal spray flu vaccination being offered to children in their schools during the autumn term 2015. It is not intended for children or parents/guardians as they will receive their own dedicated information at the appropriate time.

Background to the programme

From October 2015, all children of school years 1 and 2 age in England will be offered flu vaccination in the form of a nasal spray. For the majority of children this will be offered via a school-based programme, although in a few areas it may be through alternative schemes such as community pharmacies and general practices. The reason that the programme is mostly being offered in schools is because school-based immunisation programmes provide a very effective means of delivering important health programmes to school-aged children, ensuring good uptake. Children in reception year will also be offered vaccination, although this is more likely to be delivered by their GP.

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children. Annual immunisation will not only provide important protection to individual children but will also reduce the spread of flu to their families and the wider community, protecting younger siblings, grandparents and others who are at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from flu. There is also some evidence to suggest that vaccinating children will have a positive impact on school absenteeism, improving the educational opportunities of children.

This extension of the national flu immunisation programme to children of school years 1 and 2 age is part of a phased roll-out of flu immunisation to children. It is based on the advice from an independent expert committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, that advises the Government on vaccination policies.

The role of schools and school staff

When do the vaccinations need to be given?

To be effective, vaccinations need to be given between October and December (preferably before flu starts circulating). As flu viruses can change, vaccines are made each year to provide protection against the predicted circulating flu viruses, hence the vaccine needs to be given on an annual basis.

When will schools be contacted?

If your local NHS England team plans to deliver this programme through schools in your area, local health service providers should be in touch between April and June 2015 (if they are not already in contact with you). They will explain how the programme is planned to be delivered in your area to children who attend your school, including whether children in the reception year will be offered vaccination in the school or by their GP.

What will schools be asked to do?

You will be asked to:

- work with the healthcare team to develop and agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school. The more time that is given to planning, the more likely it is that the programme will run smoothly
- agree a date for the vaccination session and provide a suitable location for the immunisation to take place (e.g. school hall or classroom). The healthcare team will agree their specific requirements with you
- agree a process for providing parents with the invitation letter, information leaflet and consent form.

Schools may be asked to help with the tasks that cannot easily be done by the healthcare team such as sending information home with children, collecting completed consent forms, and taking children to and from the vaccination session where necessary. Local healthcare teams will be making contact with schools in areas where a schools-based delivery model has been agreed and will work with schools to ensure minimum disruption.

Delivery of the programme will be dependent on local circumstances, commissioning arrangements and schools agreeing to host the vaccination session. Where schools do not host sessions, or four-year-olds

already at school are being invited through general practice, then children may need to be released from school to receive their vaccine elsewhere.

Who will be giving the vaccine to the children?

The programme will be delivered by a healthcare team including nurses, healthcare support workers and administrative staff. They may be part of the school health service, or from a specialist immunisation team. The healthcare team will administer the vaccination and will work to nationally set standards. Staff will have appropriate qualifications and training.

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

Parental consent will be arranged via a letter, information leaflet and consent form that the healthcare team will provide. Ideally this will be sent home from school with the child. It should be signed by parents or guardians and returned to the healthcare team by the deadline agreed with the team. In most cases the healthcare team will ask that parents return these forms to the school and the healthcare team will collect them from there.

How will the healthcare team identify the children to be vaccinated?

The healthcare team will have a list of all eligible children for whom consent has been received. They may ask the class teacher or assistant to confirm the identity of younger children before giving the vaccination.

Who decides whether a child receives the vaccination?

Only eligible children for whom consent has been received will be vaccinated. The healthcare team will make all decisions regarding whether a child should receive the vaccination, taking into account information on the consent form and, for example, whether the child is well on the day.

Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccination is not mandatory. Parents will need to give their informed consent for the vaccination. The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (derived from pigs). Some faith groups may or may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to the parents/guardians.

What happens if a child is not present on the day when vaccination is offered in the school?

This will depend on local arrangements and the healthcare team will discuss arrangements with you.

What should be done if a child becomes unwell after receiving the vaccination?

If the healthcare team is still on site, seek advice directly from them. If the healthcare team have left the site, manage according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school and contact the healthcare team to ensure they are aware and can report any event related to the administration of the vaccine.

Can teachers have the vaccine?

Not as part of the programme. The nasal spray vaccine, Fluenz Tetra®, used in this programme is not licensed for adults. Some schools, however, may choose to provide an injectable vaccine for their teachers through their own occupational health services.

Staff with certain medical conditions that put them more at risk of flu, or who are pregnant, are entitled to free flu vaccination (injectable vaccine) through the NHS. Eligible staff should contact their GP practice.

Why are only children of school years 1 and 2 age being offered the vaccine in the majority of areas?

The extension of the national flu immunisation programme to children of school years 1 and 2 age is part of a phased roll-out of flu immunisation to children, based on the advice of independent experts. More birth cohorts will be included in future as the programme expands.

What about children in reception year?

Children in reception year may be offered vaccination as part of the schools-based programme, depending on local circumstances. If this is happening in your area your healthcare team will include this in your school plan. Where reception children are not included in the schools programme, their GP will offer vaccination.

Are pre-school children being offered flu vaccination in general practice?

Yes, all children who are aged two, three and four years old on 31 August 2015 will be offered flu vaccination through general practice. Depending on local circumstances, some four-year-olds who have started school may be offered flu vaccination through schools.

Why are all primary school age children being offered the vaccine in some areas?

Six areas around the country have been piloting the programme for the past two years. These pilot areas will continue to offer the vaccine to all primary school-aged children.

How effective is the vaccine?

You may have heard that the flu vaccine provided low protection against flu infection last year because of a mismatch between one strain, A(H3N2), selected for the vaccine and the main A(H3N2) strain that circulated during the winter. It is important that these results do not discourage parents/ guardians from taking up the vaccination for their child in 2015/16. Throughout the last decade, there has generally been a good match between the strains of flu selected in the vaccine and those that subsequently circulated. The vaccine still provides the best protection available to protect people at risk from flu and those individuals are advised to seek immunisation.



The nasal spray flu vaccine

- Almost all children will be eligible to have the vaccine as a nasal spray (up the nose), which is a quick and painless process
- Serious side effects are uncommon but many children can develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, some tiredness or loss of appetite that lasts for a short period.
- The 'Protecting your child against flu' leaflet provides more information for parents on the vaccine, including how it works and contraindications

All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the healthcare team. School staff will not be expected to answer questions about this programme.

Further information

The healthcare team will share a copy of a template letter to be sent to parents, the 'Protecting your child against flu' printed leaflet, and consent form. This information will include a contact point so any queries from school staff or parents about the programme can be directed to the healthcare team. This will ensure parents are able to access advice about the suitability of the vaccine for their child in confidence.

Further updates on the national flu immunisation programme, including the extension of the programme to children, will be added to the Public Health England website in the lead up to the 2015/16 flu season at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme



For more information on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation see: www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation