

Influenza Immunisation

You should have a 'flu-jab' each autumn if you are at increased risk of developing complications if you get flu (influenza).

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) causes a high temperature (fever), muscle aches, cough, and various other symptoms. Each year a different strain of the flu virus causes a winter outbreak of flu. If you are normally well, flu usually lasts a few days, and then goes as your immune system clears the virus. However, some people who have flu develop serious complications such as pneumonia. Many people in the UK die each year (usually elderly people) from the complications of flu.

The immunisation

Flu immunisation (the 'flu-jab') gives good protection against flu, and lasts for one year. The vaccine is normally ready by the autumn each year. It is made from the strains of flu virus which are expected in the coming winter. You need a yearly immunisation to keep protected.

Flu immunisation does not prevent other virus infections which can cause coughs and colds. It protects only against the influenza virus which is expected in the coming winter. The flu immunisation does not *cause* illness. It is a coincidence if you develop a cough or cold shortly after having a flu immunisation.

Who should be immunised against flu?

The aim is to protect people who are more likely to develop complications from flu. You should be immunised if you:

- have a lung disease such as asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, etc.
- have heart disease, a serious kidney disease, or diabetes.
- have a poor immune system. (For example, if you have no spleen, are taking chemotherapy or steroid treatment, if you have HIV/AIDS, etc.)
- are aged 65 or over.
- live in a nursing home or other long stay residential care accommodation.

Also, staff involved in direct patient care may be offered immunisation from their employer.

Are there any side effects from flu immunisation?

Modern flu immunisation usually causes no problems. You may have a temporary mild soreness at the injection site. Rarely, it can cause a mild fever, and slight muscle aches for a day or so. This soon settles and does not lead to flu. Allergic reactions to the vaccine are rare.

Who should not have flu immunisation?

- If you are hyper-sensitive to egg (rare). This is because the vaccine is made in hens' eggs.
- If you have had a previous allergic reaction to a flu vaccine (rare).
- It is best to avoid immunisation if you are pregnant.
- If you are healthy and under 65 (as you are unlikely to develop complications from flu.)