

Press release: PHE urges those at highest risk of flu to get vaccinated

People who are the most vulnerable to flu are being urged to get their free vaccination from today (12 October 2017), ahead of the winter period when the virus is most common.

This year, Public Health England (PHE) are aiming to vaccinate more people than ever – around 13 million people in total. Children in school year 4 will be offered the vaccine for the first time and children over age 4 in reception year can get their vaccine in school.

The national drive marks the start of 'Stay Well This Winter', an initiative from PHE and NHS England to help the most vulnerable people prepare for winter and avoid having to visit hospital due to common winter illnesses.

Professor Paul Cosford, PHE's Medical Director, said:

This year we are offering the nasal spray vaccine to more children than ever. Ensuring children get vaccinated is extremely important not only to protect them from flu but also to stop them spreading it to vulnerable groups they come in to contact with. For someone with a long term health condition like asthma or COPD, flu has the potential to turn very serious. We want as many eligible people as possible to get their jab, as it is the best way to protect everyone from flu and minimise the burden on the NHS during the season when it faces the most pressures.

Around 6.3 million people under 65 in England have a long-term health condition and are more at risk of suffering potentially fatal complications from flu. Last year, uptake amongst high risk groups increased by 3.5% amongst eligible people.

Those who are eligible for the free flu vaccine include:

- adults over 65
- pregnant women
- children aged 2 and 3 as well as pupils in reception class and school years 1 to 4
- people with long-term health conditions (including asthma, COPD and cardiovascular issues)

Another way of protecting vulnerable adults is to vaccinate children, who are 'super-spreaders' of the vaccine. For healthy children aged 2 and 3 the flu vaccine is in the form of a nasal spray, administered by a health professional. Parents of over 3 million children in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3 and 4 will be asked to agree to have their children vaccinated in school.

Last year's flu vaccination programme reduced the risk of flu in children who received the vaccine by 65.8% compared to those that didn't.

Dr. Rosemary Leonard, GP and broadcaster, said:

Young children's bodies can find it hard to cope with flu, so it is especially important to protect them with the vaccine. The nasal spray is a quick, effective and painless alternative to needles.

Once ill, children also tend to spread infection more than adults. The vaccine helps to reduce the spread of flu to other more vulnerable family members, such as grandparents.

To get your vaccine or find out if you are eligible, contact your GP, pharmacist or midwife for more information. Visit [nhs.uk/staywell](https://www.nhs.uk/staywell) for more details on how to help you and your family to stay well this winter.

1. [Public Health England](https://www.phe.gov.uk) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. It does this through advocacy, partnerships, world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Follow us on Twitter [@PHE_uk](https://twitter.com/PHE_uk).
2. The national flu campaign will also encourage pregnant women to protect themselves against flu in the run up to winter. Pregnancy naturally weakens the body's immune system and as a result, flu can cause serious complications for the mother and baby.
3. For the first time, year 4 children will be offered the vaccine in a school setting, along with year groups 1, 2 and 3. Evidence shows this method ensures greater uptake of the vaccine, and consequently offers greater population protection through herd immunity.