

Q. Do flu vaccines work?

A. In a typical year having a flu vaccine will reduce your risk of having flu by 30-60 per cent.

Having an annual flu vaccine remains one of the best ways to protect against catching or spreading flu. It is important that people get the vaccine recommended for them based on their age.

Q. Can we know before the end of the flu season how effective flu vaccines have been?

A. Information on vaccine effectiveness is not available until the end of each season. During the season, any information available is provisional.

Before flu viruses starts to circulate widely it's not possible to know with any certainty, beyond World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, which flu strains will predominate or predict vaccine effectiveness during a season.

Q. How effective was the flu vaccine last year?

A. Comparisons between years will vary, as the flu strains that predominate each year will also vary, which makes it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons.

The COVID-19 pandemic response has caused significant disruption to our analytical work, so we do not yet have a published report yet on influenza vaccine effectiveness from the 2019/20 flu season. Our latest available data is from the 2018/29 season, when overall effectiveness was 44.3% against all laboratory-confirmed influenza.

<http://nww.immunisation.wales.nhs.uk/flu-ve>

Q. Will this year be a severe flu season in the UK?

A. It is difficult to predict but we anticipate COVID-19 and flu co-circulating this year.

Q. Who is given what vaccine and why?

A. There are a number of different flu vaccines available again this season. With some working better than others in different age groups they are broadly recommended by age.

For children aged two years and over, the recommended vaccine is a nasal spray. Children in primary school will be offered the vaccine in school. The nasal spray is not suitable for children under two years old. Children in an at-risk group from six months of who are not vaccinated in school should have their flu vaccine at their GP surgery. For adults the flu vaccine is an injection given in the upper arm.

There are a range of flu vaccine available this year, which will help improve effectiveness. Different vaccines are recommended according to age:

- *Children aged 6 months to under two years in a risk group for flu – Quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIVe) injection*
- *Children aged 2 and over - Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) nasal spray*
- *Under 65 years - Quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIVe or QIVc) injection*
- *Age 65 and over – Adjuvanted trivalent influenza vaccine (aTIV or QIVc) injection*

Q. Why isn't the vaccine being rolled out to all/other groups (e.g. teachers)?

A. Across the UK, annual flu vaccination is a targeted programme recommended for people who are most at risk of becoming very ill if they catch flu, or are at high risk of spreading flu to vulnerable individuals. This is the programme recommended by independent experts at the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) which advises UK health departments on immunisation.

[\[www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation\]](http://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation)

This year more people than ever are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine in Wales. This includes free vaccine to the household contacts of all those on the COVID-19 NHS shielding patient list, and people with a learning disability.

When more vaccine is made available (probably November/December time) age eligibility may be dropped from 65 to younger age groups.

Q. How effective is the flu vaccine?

A. Flu vaccine effectiveness varies every year depending on which strains were included in the vaccine and which strains circulate in the community. Circulating flu viruses are constantly changing, and vaccines are updated each season based on World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations. For this flu season there are a number of different flu vaccines recommended according to age, based on which are more effective.

In a typical year having a flu vaccine will reduce your risk of having flu by 30-60%.

Flu vaccination is one of the best ways to protect yourself against flu and it is strongly recommended that all those at increased risk – especially those aged 65 and over, pregnant women and those with long term health conditions – have a flu vaccine every year to protect themselves and others.

Q. What are the symptoms of flu?

A. When people get flu they tend to become ill quite quickly. Symptoms can include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, often with a cough and sore throat.

Other people have flu without even realising it - and they can still spread it to others, sometimes with devastating effects. Some COVID-19 symptoms are similar to flu so if you have symptoms that could be flu or COVID-19 it is important to isolate at home, check the latest advice and follow the current COVID-19 guidelines.

Q. What should I do if I get flu?

A. Some COVID-19 symptoms are similar to flu so if you think you might have flu or COVID-19, it is important to isolate at home, check the latest advice and follow the current COVID-19 guidelines.

If you think you might have flu it is important to rest at home, keep warm and drink plenty of water. You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower a high temperature and relieve aches if necessary.

To help stop flu spreading, remember to:

- **Catch it** – use tissues to catch your cough or sneeze
- **Bin it** – dispose of your tissue as soon as possible
- **Kill it** – clean your hands as soon as you can

People in high risk groups should seek medical attention if they have flu-like-symptoms promptly as their doctor may wish to prescribe antiviral medicines.

Flu can be serious. If you have flu and are eligible for a flu vaccine but have not yet had your vaccine remember to get it once you have recovered. .

Q. Is it safe to visit a GP surgery or community pharmacy to have a flu vaccine?

A. This year's flu vaccine will be given following the current guidance around social distancing, infection control and personal protective equipment (PPE), to help keep you safe. Arrangements may be different because of COVID-19. For the latest information, see www.beatflu.org

Q. Are we likely to see flu and COVID-19 co-circulating this winter?

A. We don't know for sure, but there is every likelihood that both illnesses will be circulating this winter in Wales. That is why it is important to have an annual flu vaccine if you are eligible.

Q. Why are you advertising flu vaccine advertising when COVID-19 is much more of a threat? Shouldn't the NHS just focus on that disease and not confuse everyone with flu?

A. Flu is a serious illness that can kill. Last year across the UK more than 11,000 people died from it. Vaccinations are the best way to help to protect yourself and others against catching or spreading flu. By getting vaccinated you reduce the risk of infection. That also helps protect the NHS from having to treat more serious cases of flu when it is also on stand-by to treat cases of COVID-19. That is why the Beat Flu campaign is more important than ever this year.

Flu vaccines are available from your local general practice and also from many community pharmacies. If you fall into an eligible group please visit your GP surgery, or talk to your community pharmacy.

Q. When is the best time for my child to have their flu vaccine in school, and what happens if schools are affected by COVID-19 local lock-downs: will the vaccine be too late to protect my child?

A. Offering children their flu vaccine in primary school helps ensure more children are protected against flu. However, due to the large number of schools to visit, some schools will be later than others.

We cannot predict how many schools could potentially be affected by local COVID-19 lock-downs over the course of the flu season. However, Health Boards and schools, will always do their best to reschedule vaccination sessions if they are disrupted in this way.

It is best to have a flu vaccine before flu starts to circulate, which is usually no earlier than mid-December.

Parents of children in a risk group for flu who attend a school where the vaccine is offered in December may prefer to contact their GP surgery to arrange for them to get their vaccine sooner.

Q. [IN CASE OF LOCAL LOCKDOWNS AFFECTING VACCINATIONS] My child's flu vaccine session in primary school was cancelled, when will they get their flu vaccine?

A. You will be notified by the school when your child's primary school flu vaccine session is rearranged.

If your child has a long-term health condition they are increased risk from flu and its complications so you should contact their GP surgery now to arrange for them to have their flu vaccine as nasal spray flu vaccines are available for children with a long-term health condition in general practice.

Q. [IN CASE OF LOCAL LOCKDOWNS PUSHING VACCINATION DELIVERY INTO JANUARY] My child's primary school has been notified that their rescheduled vaccination session is in January. Isn't this too late?

A. Having a flu vaccine in January will still help protect your child from flu. Typically flu starts to circulate in Wales from mid-December until March/April.

Children who have a long-term health condition are at increased risk from flu and its complications should contact their GP surgery now to have their flu vaccine. These children are the most vulnerable to flu and its complications so it is important they get their flu vaccine early if possible

Q. Will Brexit threaten vaccine supplies?

A. No, we are well prepared and the Brexit process is not having any effect on vaccines supply.