

Childhood influenza vaccination programme 2017-18 Information for primary schools

This information is designed for headteachers and school staff to answer questions about the influenza (flu) vaccination being offered to children in schools this autumn.

Please do not photocopy this document to give to children or parents/guardians as they will receive their own information at the appropriate time from the healthcare team.

Background

In September 2013 a routine childhood influenza (flu) vaccination programme was introduced in a phased manner in Wales. The programme is based on independent expert advice, from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) that advises the UK governments.

Children can (and do) get flu, just like adults. Flu in children results in absence from school and many GP visits. It can cause severe complications, especially in young children, resulting in hospital admissions. Vaccinating children will help protect them from flu infection, and will also help reduce the spread of flu in school and to family and friends in the community.

Evidence from Scotland and pilot areas in England, where all children aged two to 11 years old have been offered annual flu vaccine for several years, indicates the children's programme has had a positive impact on flu levels, both for the vaccinated children and the wider community. In these areas there has been less illness in the community with fewer GP consultations, hospital admissions, and emergency department attendances.

The flu vaccine offered to most children is a nasal spray vaccine called Fluenz[®] Tetra, which provides greater protection in children compared with injected flu vaccines. Nasal spray flu vaccine has an excellent safety record, it has been used in the UK school programme for the past four years and more than a hundred thousand doses have been given.

Flu vaccination of school-aged children also helps to promote a healthy school environment and may reduce absenteeism amongst pupils and staff.

Which children will be offered the nasal spray flu vaccination in school this autumn?

Children in reception class, year 1, year 2, year 3 and year 4 in primary school will be offered the vaccination as part of a school based programme during the 2017 autumn school term.

Are preschool children also being offered the nasal spray flu vaccination?

Children aged two or three years old on 31 August 2017 will be offered the vaccination at their GP surgery (children born on or between 1 September 2013 and 31 August 2015).

Children aged four years old on 31 August 2017 who have not started school, when flu vaccine is offered in school, can also obtain their vaccine from their GP surgery.

Why are only some children being offered the nasal spray flu vaccine now?

Children aged two to eight years old are being offered flu vaccine as younger children are most vulnerable to flu and are more likely to require hospital admission. Nasal spray flu vaccine is not suitable for children younger than two years old.

The childhood flu vaccination programme is being phased in over a several years. As with all new immunisation programmes the JCVI will carefully monitor and assess the impact of the programme to better understand and implement the full roll out. Next year, in September 2018, two additional school years (year 5 and 6) will be added to the programme.

When do the nasal spray flu vaccinations need to be given?

To be most effective flu vaccinations should ideally be given between October and December before flu viruses start to circulate in the community.

Immunity wanes and the flu viruses circulating, and causing health problems, can change so flu vaccine content is reviewed each year to match the viruses that are expected to be circulating that winter. Annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

When will schools be contacted?

Your local health board will contact schools in your area sometime between June and September 2017. Someone may have already been in contact with you. They will explain how and when the programme will be delivered in your school.

How will the school be involved in the flu vaccination programme?

Local arrangements for your school will be made by your school nursing team who will be in touch to agree what will be required. A parental letter, leaflet and consent form will need to be distributed to all pupils due to receive the vaccine, and the completed consent form returned to school prior to vaccination. A suitable room will need to be made available for the vaccination session. Healthcare teams will work with schools to minimise disruption.

Schools will 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, taking children to and from the immunisation session and assisting with the identification of individual children. The school nurse may need to liaise closely with the school when children have similar names.

Delivery of the programme will depend on local arrangements and schools agreeing to host the vaccination session. Where schools do not host sessions children may need to be released from school to have their vaccination at their GP surgery.

Who will give the nasal spray flu vaccine to children in school?

The programme will be delivered by a healthcare team including nurses, healthcare support workers and administration staff. They may be part of a school nursing or school immunisation team.

How will the nasal spray flu vaccine be given?

The vaccine is called Fluenz[®] Tetra, and it is given as a nasal spray. One spray is given up each nostril. The child can breathe normally while the vaccine is being administered. Children that have received this vaccine say that it feels like a tickle up the nose.

What happens if a child is unwell after the nasal spray flu vaccination?

Nasal spray flu vaccine has an excellent safety record but, as with any medicine, a very small number of people may feel unwell after having it.

In the unlikely event that a child is unwell after their 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. After appropriate arrangements have made for the child, contact the healthcare team to ensure that they are aware of the event.

Can children catch flu from the nasal spray flu vaccine?

No. Fluenz[®] Tetra contains viruses that have been weakened so it cannot cause flu.

The vaccine helps children build up immunity in the same way as a natural infection (but without the nasty symptoms) and is more effective than the injected flu vaccines, particularly in children.

Are there any side effects of the nasal spray flu vaccine?

Serious side effects are uncommon, but many children can develop a runny or stuffy nose, headache, some tiredness or loss of appetite that lasts generally no longer than a few days.

Can all children receive the nasal spray vaccine?

All questions about suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the healthcare team, school staff will not be expected to answer questions regarding this.

Nasal spray vaccine will be suitable for most children. Parents of children who cannot receive the nasal spray vaccine will be advised by the nursing team to contact their GP surgery to arrange a flu vaccine injection for their child.

Are children protected from flu for life after having the nasal spray flu vaccine?

No. Flu viruses can change and a vaccine is made each year to match the viruses that are expected to be circulating that winter. Annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

Parental consent will be arranged via a letter, information leaflet and consent form which the healthcare team will provide. Ideally this information will be sent home from school with the child. The consent form should be signed by the parent/ guardian and returned by the agreed deadline to school where they will be collected by the healthcare team.

Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. Vaccination is not mandatory. Parents will need to give their informed consent for the vaccination.

Will parents need to be present when the vaccination is given?

There is no expectation that parents will need to attend while their child has their vaccination.

What happens if a child is absent from school on the day of the vaccination session?

When parental consent has been given for a child to have flu vaccine in school but the child is absent on the day of the school session, the healthcare team will provide the parent with a letter to enable them to arrange their child's missed flu vaccination at their GP surgery.

Can school staff have the vaccine?

Fluenz[®] Tetra, the nasal spray flu vaccine used in the programme, is not licensed for use in adults.

School staff at increased risk of complications from flu due to pregnancy, age or a long term health condition should have a flu vaccination from their GP or community pharmacy.

Some education providers may choose to offer flu vaccination to teachers and school staff through their own occupational health services.

Individuals who are not eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine or offered it as part of an occupational health scheme may choose to purchase a flu vaccine privately from a community pharmacy or private healthcare provider.

Where can I get further information?

For further information please contact your named school nurse who will be able to advise on information and resources for parents and pupils.

Links to informative internet resources are included below:

Beat flu web page

www.beatflu.org

www.curwchfliw.org

2017 Children's flu leaflet will be available from

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/doityourself/vaccinations/Leaflets/

More information on influenza and vaccination is available from

http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/f/article/flu_seasonal/

Fluenz[®] Tetra patient information leaflet

www.medicines.org.uk/emc/medicine/29109