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Mental health and learning disabilities

Seasonal flu

Protect yourself and other people

This easy read booklet is about who should get a flu jab and why. It also tells you how you can protect yourself and other people from flu.

When we say we in this booklet we mean the National Health Service or NHS for short.



There are some difficult words in this booklet.

There is a list of these words and what they mean on page 17.

These words are in **red letters** in the booklet.

You may like to have someone to support you when you look at this booklet.



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You may have heard a lot recently about different sorts of flu.

This booklet tells you:

- what seasonal flu is
- who is most at risk from seasonal flu
- why it is very important that some people should get their free seasonal flu jab. Jab is another word for an injection
- how the seasonal flu jab works
- what swine flu is.

What is seasonal flu?

Flu is caused by different sorts of germs.



Seasonal flu is the sort of flu that happens every year, usually in the winter.



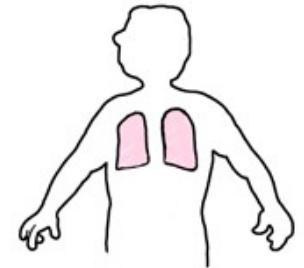
Seasonal flu spreads very easily. It can be a nasty illness, even for people who are fit and healthy.



For people who already have a serious illness, flu can be much worse.



Seasonal flu can also make you more likely to get more serious illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia. These are illnesses which affect your lungs and may mean you need to go to hospital. They could even kill you.



People sometimes call a bad cold the flu, but having flu is often much worse than a cold.



Flu symptoms start quickly and can be quite bad. Symptoms are what you feel that tell you that you are ill.



Flu symptoms are usually:

- fever, when you feel very hot and sweaty



- chills



- headache



- aching muscles



- cough and sore throat.

Scientists can find out about the most common seasonal flu germs and make vaccines to help protect people who are more at risk if they catch seasonal flu.



A vaccine is made from dead flu germs. Vaccines help your body fight off seasonal flu. They are given to you by a jab in your arm.



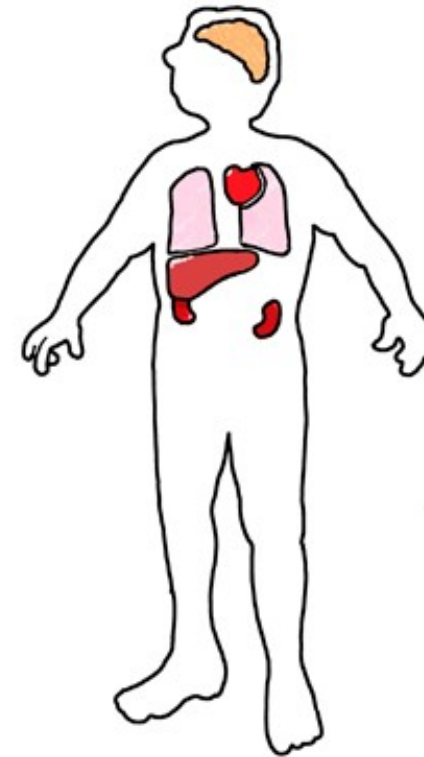
Seasonal flu germs are not killed by antibiotics.

Who should have a seasonal flu jab?

Some people are more at risk from seasonal flu.

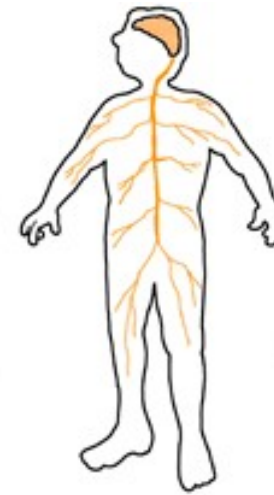
Even if you feel healthy, you should have a seasonal flu jab if you have:

- a heart problem
- breathing problems like bronchitis
- a kidney problem
- a weak immune system. Your immune system is the part of your body that fights off illness and keeps you well
- a liver problem
- had a stroke or TIA. TIA is short for transient ischaemic attack. It is a sort of less serious or mini stroke
- diabetes
- a problem with your spleen or have had your spleen taken out. Your spleen is a part of your body that helps protect you against illness



- a problem with your nervous system like multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy.

You can also have the seasonal flu jab if you are pregnant and have one of these health conditions.



You should also have the seasonal flu jab if you:

- are over 65 years old
- live in a care home
- are a carer for an older or disabled person. This is because the jab will help you to stay healthy so you can carry on looking after that person. And it means that you will not give them the flu.



If you are one of the people who are at more risk from seasonal flu, it is important that you get a seasonal flu jab.

When can I have a seasonal flu jab?

It is best to have the seasonal flu jab in the autumn before seasonal flu starts to be a problem.

You can usually have the jab from the beginning of October. So make sure you ask about getting a jab as early as possible this autumn.

You can ask:

- your doctor
- your practice nurse
- your local chemist.

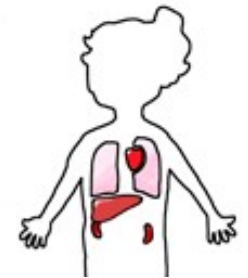


Children and seasonal flu

Some children are more at risk from flu than other children.



If a child has one of the problems in the list on pages 6 and 7, or has been in hospital with a breathing problem, they may not get better from seasonal flu as easily as other children.



They may be very ill if they get seasonal flu and it could make their health problems worse.



If you have a child who you think is more at risk from seasonal flu, you should talk to your doctor or practice nurse about giving them a seasonal flu jab.



Is there anyone who should not have a seasonal flu jab?

Most people can have the seasonal flu jab.

Children can have the seasonal flu jab at the same time as their other injections.

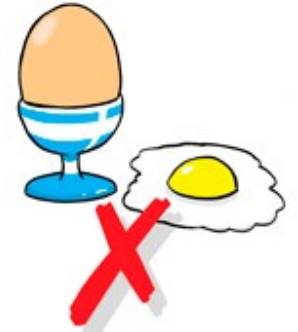


Children can have the jab even if they have a cold. But if they have a fever, they should wait until they are better.



But you should not have the jab if:

- you have ever been very ill because of a flu jab
- you cannot eat hens' eggs because they make you very ill.



If you have a fever, it is best to wait until you are better before you have the jab.



How does the seasonal flu jab work?

A seasonal flu jab is the best way to protect you against seasonal flu germs.

The jab:

- helps your body to fight the flu germs
- starts to work after about 7 to 10 days
- protects you for a whole year.



The jab does not protect you against:

- swine flu
- colds.



The jab also does not protect you against:

- other winter germs, which are often less serious than seasonal flu.



Most people who have the seasonal flu jab will not get seasonal flu.

But some people may still get seasonal flu.

If you have the seasonal flu jab and are unlucky enough to get seasonal flu, the flu is likely to be less bad.



We change the jab every year because the seasonal flu germs change all the time. So if you are one of the people who are most at risk, you need to have a seasonal flu jab every year.



If you are one of the people who are most at risk from seasonal flu, speak to your doctor or practice nurse about having a jab as soon as possible.



Can the seasonal flu jab give me flu?

The vaccine is made from dead flu germs. It does not contain any live germs, so a flu jab cannot give you flu.

You may have some small side effects from the jab. But these are not serious.

You might have:

- a slight temperature
- aching muscles for 1 or 2 days
- a sore arm where it was injected.



Any other side effects are very rare.

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a completely new flu germ that you might have heard about. Swine flu is a different kind of flu from seasonal flu.

If you are immune to seasonal flu, it means that your body is able to fight off seasonal flu germs. But not many people are immune to swine flu.



Swine flu can happen at any time of the year.



Swine flu may affect more people than seasonal flu, and it might be more serious.



Scientists have made a vaccine that protects people against swine flu.



The vaccine is ready now.





We will give the vaccine first to people who are most likely to need it.

- people who live with, or look after, people with a weak immune system



The people who most need the vaccine are:

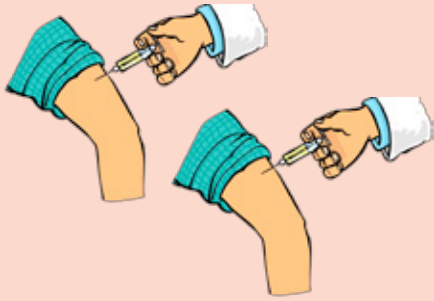
- people between 6 months old and 65 years old who are also at risk from seasonal flu. These are the people in the list on pages 6 and 7.

- people over 65 who are also at risk from seasonal flu. These are the people in the list on pages 6 and 7.

Other people who most need the vaccine are:

- pregnant women





The seasonal flu jab does not stop you getting swine flu. But you may be able to have a jab for swine flu at the same time as a jab for seasonal flu.

What the words mean

bronchitis

An illness of the lungs

immune system

The part of your body that fights off illness and keeps you well

pneumonia

A serious illness of the lungs

seasonal flu

A sort of flu that happens every year, usually in the winter

seasonal flu jab

A free injection to help protect you against seasonal flu

swine flu

A new sort of flu that is worse than seasonal flu

vaccine

A chemical made from dead flu germs which helps your body fight off seasonal flu

How to find out more

You can find out more about seasonal flu on our websites.

If you live in England
www.nhs.uk



If you live in Scotland
www.nhs24.com
www.scotland.gov.uk



If you live in Wales
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk
www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation



If you live in Northern Ireland
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk
www.nidirect.gov.uk



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