

FLU FACTS FOR CARERS

What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious disease. The symptoms, that may come on very quickly, include fever, chills, headaches, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness. A bad bout of flu is worse than a heavy cold. You are likely to spend a few days in bed. Serious infections, although less common, can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability and even death.

What causes flu?

Flu is caused by viruses that are spread from person to person. They infect the respiratory system, where they can lead to pneumonia and other complications. The viruses are constantly changing and this is one of the main reasons why people should be vaccinated annually.

How is flu spread?

Flu is spread by coughs and sneezes that propel infected droplets of saliva or nasal secretions into the air which are then breathed in by others. The disease is also spread by people touching surfaces that the droplets have landed on and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. This is why frequent hand washing or using an antiseptic hand rub is so important during the winter flu season.

How can I avoid catching flu?

It's quite hard to avoid because people may shed the virus a day or so before symptoms start to show (as well as up to seven days after), they won't know if they are spreading the virus or not. So it's very hard to avoid contact with people infected with the flu virus. And, of course, members of your family can always bring it into the home. Washing your hands regularly can reduce the risk of contracting the infection but can't prevent you catching the disease by breathing in the infected droplets in the air.

So the best way to help avoid getting flu is by having the vaccination.

Who is eligible to receive a free flu jab?

Anyone who is the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill is eligible to receive a free flu vaccination. This is the case even if you are not in receipt of a carer's allowance.

When should I have the vaccination?

The flu vaccine needs to be given before flu starts circulating during the winter season.

Ideally this means you should have it during September or October, but if it is later in the year than this and you have not had your vaccination you should still ask your GP surgery about having it.

Who will give me the vaccination?

You are eligible for free flu vaccination through your GP surgery. If you have not received a flu vaccination invitation from your GP by mid-October you should ring them to arrange an appointment. You will be given the vaccination as an injection in the arm.

Will I get any side effects?

There are some fairly common but mild side effects. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected. Any other reactions are very rare.

Will I be completely protected by the vaccination?

No, but by having the vaccination you will be reducing your risk of getting flu and helping yourself to stay healthy.

I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need another one this year?

Yes; the flu vaccine for this winter provides protection against some different strains of flu from last year's. For this reason we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.



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