

# Flu Vaccine

## Information for People at Risk



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

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## About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you about the seasonal flu vaccine. It focuses on who should get the vaccine, when and how to get it, as well as other useful information.

**Please read carefully.**

## **What is seasonal influenza (flu)?**

Influenza (flu) is a very infectious illness caused by the flu virus. The virus infects the airways and the lungs.

Flu circulates in the community during the flu season. The flu season usually starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

## **Can flu cause serious illness?**

**Yes**, the flu can cause serious illness and life-threatening complications including pneumonia, bronchitis and, on rare occasions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

Flu also can make chronic health problems worse.

Some people are more at risk of these serious complications including people aged 60 and older, pregnant women, and people with an underlying health condition such as diabetes and chronic lung disease.

## **What is the difference between a cold and the flu?**

A cold usually comes on gradually with a sore throat and a blocked or runny nose and its symptoms are usually mild.

Flu symptoms start suddenly with fever, muscle aches, headaches and extreme tiredness (fatigue). It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from symptoms of COVID-19.

## **What is the flu vaccine?**

A vaccine is a product that helps the body's immune system (defence system) to fight against infections. Each year the flu viruses change, so each year the flu vaccine changes to provide protection from the new strains of flu virus expected.

## How does the flu vaccine work?

The flu vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies (proteins that fight infection). If you have had the flu vaccine and you come into contact with the flu virus, the vaccine can stop you from getting sick.

## Who should get the flu vaccine

We recommend the flu vaccine for:

- People aged 60 years and over
- Children aged 2-17 years (please read HSE leaflet on flu vaccine for children)
- Pregnant women (please read HSE leaflet on flu vaccine for pregnancy)
- People (adults and children) with long-term medical conditions such as diabetes, chronic heart conditions, liver conditions, kidney conditions and chronic lung disease including COPD, or neurological diseases
- People with cancer
- Children on long-term aspirin treatment
- People whose immune system is impaired due to disease or treatment
- People who are obese who have a body mass index (BMI) of over 40
- People with Down syndrome and children with moderate to severe neurodevelopmental disorders
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-stay institutions
- Healthcare workers
- Carers
- People who live in the same house as someone who is at risk of flu because of a medical condition
- People with regular close contact with poultry, water fowl or pigs.

## What flu vaccines are available this flu season?

The 2024-2025 HSE seasonal flu vaccination programme will offer 3 vaccines:

- Influvac Tetra, supplied by Viatris for people with long term conditions and people aged 60 years and older
- Quadrivalent influenza vaccine (split virion, inactivated) supplied by Sanofi for people with long term conditions and people aged 60 years and older
- The Fluenz nasal spray suspension Influenza vaccine (live attenuated, nasal) supplied by AstraZeneca AB for children aged 2-17 years

## Why do people aged 60 years and over need the flu vaccine?

People aged 60 years and over are more at risk of severe illness, hospitalisation or death from flu. The flu vaccine is the best protection against flu.

## Why do pregnant women need the flu vaccine?

If you are pregnant, you are at higher risk of complications from flu. The flu can also affect your baby, for example, flu can cause miscarriage, premature birth and even stillbirth.

The flu vaccine protects pregnant women during pregnancy and also protects their newborn baby during their first few months of life.

If you are pregnant, please read the HSE flu leaflet for pregnant women.

## How safe is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is very safe. Flu vaccines have been given for more than 60 years to millions of people worldwide.

## What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Common side effects are mild. After the flu vaccine you may get side effects including soreness, redness and swelling where the injection was given. Headaches, muscle pains and tiredness can also develop. These side effects may last for a few days.

Serious reactions are very rare; a severe allergic reaction occurs in one in a million people.

## Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

**No.** The flu vaccine can't give you the flu.

## Why do I need the flu vaccine every year?

Each year the circulating flu viruses change, so each year the composition of the flu vaccine changes to provide protection from the new strains of flu virus expected.

## How long does it take the vaccine to work?

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks.

## Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

**No.** The flu vaccine doesn't protect against COVID-19. It is important to get both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine. This is because Flu and COVID-19 are caused by different viruses.

Flu and COVID-19 can both cause serious illness and if you get them you might need to be admitted to hospital. It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from the symptoms of COVID-19.

If you have had the COVID-19 vaccine you should still get the flu vaccine.

You can get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine if it is offered to you.

## **Who should not get the flu vaccine?**

You should **not** get the flu vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

You should not receive any flu vaccine if you have severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell); except for those with primary autoimmune neutropenia.

People on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab), should speak to their treating specialist doctor before getting the flu vaccine, because of a potentially increased incidence of immune-related adverse reactions.

## **What about people with egg allergy?**

Most people with an egg allergy can have a flu vaccine. Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

## **When should you delay getting the flu vaccine?**

There are very few reasons why getting the flu vaccine should be delayed. You may have to delay getting the flu vaccine if you are unwell – with a high temperature of more than 38°C – until you are better.

## **Where do I get the flu vaccine if I am in one of the groups for whom the vaccine is recommended?**

You can get the flu vaccine from your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

If you are a healthcare worker, your workplace may provide the vaccine at work.

## **What does the flu vaccine cost?**

If the flu vaccine is recommended for you, then the vaccine and the consultation with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist are free.

Please make an appointment with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist now.

## Tip: Pneumococcal vaccine

If you are 65 or older or have a long-term medical condition, you should also ask your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist about the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects against pneumonia. You usually only need to get pneumococcal vaccine **once**. You can get this vaccine on the same day as the flu vaccine.

For more information see:

[www.hse.ie/flu](http://www.hse.ie/flu)

You can also find a link to the patient information leaflet for the vaccine at [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie). Search for Influvac Tetra, Quadrivalent influenza vaccine (split virion, inactivated) or Fluenz.

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**National Immunisation Office**

[www.hse.ie/flu](http://www.hse.ie/flu)

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