

# Flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, autumn/winter 2023-24

## Communications toolkit v1.7

**Last updated: 26 September 2023**

The following materials are designed to support public communications around autumn/winter 2023-24 flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. This will be updated to include marketing assets and resources as these become available throughout the season.

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### Core script for autumn/winter COVID and flu

For some, flu and COVID-19 are unpleasant. But for many, particularly those with certain health conditions, older people and pregnant women, they can be very dangerous and even life-threatening. Every winter, thousands die from flu and people can still get very ill or die from COVID-19. Catching both viruses over winter increases the risk of serious illness even further.

In winter, flu and COVID-19 spread more easily as we spend more time indoors. Getting these vaccines ahead of winter are two of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others around you safe and get 'winter strong'. Over the last few years, they have kept tens of thousands of people out of hospital and helped to save countless lives. Both vaccines have a good safety and effectiveness record. Their side-effects are generally mild and do not last for more than a few days.

In line with [expert advice](#), the NHS is offering flu and COVID-19 vaccines to those at greater risk of serious illness this autumn and winter.

Those who can get both vaccines through the NHS will include everyone aged 65 and above, pregnant women, care home residents, people aged 6 months old or above with certain health conditions, frontline health and care staff, unpaid carers and household contacts of those at higher risk.

If eligible, you are encouraged to come forward as soon as you can due to the risk of the new variant, for the best possible protection. It is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or COVID-19 before, as immunity fades over time and these viruses change each year.

All eligible adults are now able to book their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. Eligible under-18s will be able to book the COVID-19 vaccine from October.

Booking your vaccines is quick and easy and usually just takes a few minutes.

To book your COVID-19 vaccine, you can use the NHS App or visit [www.nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations](https://www.nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations). More sites than ever before are offering the COVID-19 vaccine to make it as easy and convenient as possible for people to get protection. Some areas will also be offering local walk-in COVID-19 vaccinations.

Adult flu vaccinations can be [booked now](#) through your GP practice or local pharmacy, and some people may be offered their vaccinations directly by a local NHS service.

Those who can't get online can also make a booking at one of the same sites by calling 119 for free.

Most people will receive both vaccines at a GP practice or a local pharmacy. If you are pregnant, you may also be able to get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines through your local maternity service. You will be eligible at any stage of your pregnancy to help protect you and your baby.

We encourage you to get both vaccines in the same visit where possible, to get protected against both viruses in just a few minutes. If this is not possible, it is better to get each vaccine as soon as you can rather than waiting.

The [flu vaccine is also offered to most children](#) including all aged 2 and 3 years old and school aged children from reception to year 11, as well as those with underlying health conditions. The children's flu vaccine is usually given as a quick and painless spray up the nose. Children should get the flu vaccine [as soon as they can](#) for their protection and to help stop the virus spreading to others.

Children aged under 5 have one of the highest hospitalisation rates for flu. Last year, more than 6,000 under-5s in England were hospitalised by flu, and many more needed care in accident and emergency. The vaccine reduces a child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds.

School-aged children will get their flu vaccine through schools and community venues and those aged 2-3 years old or with certain health conditions can get the flu vaccine at their GP practice.

You can find out the latest information about both vaccines and how to book by visiting [www.nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations](https://www.nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations).

Protect yourself this winter. Get your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. Get winter strong.

## Key messages

### Dangers of flu and COVID-19

- While flu and COVID-19 is unpleasant for most people it can be very dangerous and even life threatening for some, particularly people with certain health conditions, older people and pregnant women
- For those that are older, pregnant or with certain health conditions, catching flu can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia or can make existing conditions worse
- Every winter, thousands die from flu and people can still become very ill or die from COVID-19
- Catching both viruses over winter increases the risk of serious illness even more
- In winter, flu and COVID-19 spread more easily as we spend more time indoors with others
- It is important to get your vaccines as soon as you can due to the risk of the BA.2.86 COVID-19 variant.

### Benefits of winter vaccines

- Vaccines are our best protection against flu and COVID-19
- Over the last few years winter vaccines have kept tens of thousands of people out of hospital and helped to save countless lives
- Getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines ahead of winter are two of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others around you safe and 'get winter strong'.
- Having your winter vaccines will reduce your risk of serious illness
- If you have your winter vaccines, you're more likely to have milder symptoms and recover quicker if you do catch the viruses
- As well as protecting you and the people around you, vaccination also protects the NHS over winter by reducing the number of people that are likely to get seriously ill from catching a virus and needing to go to hospital
- All flu and COVID-19 vaccines offered by the NHS have a good safety record. They have been tested on thousands of people across the world and have met the strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness outlined by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

## Children (flu) – [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](https://www.nhs.uk/child-flu)

- Your child can get a flu vaccine if they are
  - aged 2 or 3 years old on 31 August 2023
  - school-aged, from reception to school year 11
  - at least 6 months old with certain health conditions
- Children should receive the flu vaccine as soon as possible to protect them and help stop the virus spreading to others
- Flu can be a horrible illness in young children
- Last year 6,000 under 5s ended up in hospital because of flu
- The child flu vaccine reduces your child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds
- The child flu vaccine is usually given as a quick and painless spray up the nose
- Vaccinating your child helps protect them from flu and prevent it spreading among vulnerable family and friends
- If your child is aged 2 or 3 years old, or are aged 6 months to 2 years with certain health conditions, you can book a flu vaccination at their GP practice. Please book your child's flu vaccine as soon as the vaccine becomes available
- If your child is of school age, you do not need to make an appointment. They will be vaccinated in schools or community clinics – make sure that you sign their consent form

## Pregnant women

- Flu and COVID-19 can be serious for those that are pregnant and their unborn child
- Getting flu or COVID-19 while pregnant increases the risk of admission to intensive care, could cause your baby to be born prematurely or have low birth weight, and can even lead to stillbirth or death
- If you're pregnant you're at higher risk of serious complications, such as bronchitis and pneumonia, if you catch flu or COVID-19
- Getting vaccinated is the safest and most effective way for women to protect themselves and their baby against flu and COVID-19
- Getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines will mean you and your baby are less likely to experience complications if you catch these viruses
- The flu and COVID-19 vaccines help to protect you and your baby from serious illness and provide your baby with protection for the first few months of life
- It's safe to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at any stage of pregnancy from the first few weeks up to your expected due date and if you are breastfeeding
- If you're pregnant, get vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 as soon as you can
- As well as other booking options, some local maternity teams can give the flu and COVID-19 vaccines

## Eligibility

- The flu and COVID-19 vaccines are offered to people most at risk of getting seriously ill from flu or who are most likely to pass flu to other people at risk





- Those who can get both vaccines through the NHS will include everyone aged 65 and over, pregnant women, care home residents, people with certain health conditions, frontline health and care staff, unpaid carers and household contacts of those at higher risk.
- All eligible adults are now able to book their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Eligible children will be able to get their flu vaccine from September as soon as the vaccine is available.
- Eligible under-18s will be able to book the COVID-19 vaccine from October.
- You may be invited by the NHS to get your free winter vaccines through the NHS App, text, email or letter but you do not need to wait to get invited if you are eligible.
- It is important that you get vaccinated as soon as possible to give yourself the best possible protection ahead of winter, particularly given the risk of the new BA.2.86 COVID-19 variant.
- The JCVI has advised that, for most people, it is fine to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time.
- Where possible, we encourage you to get both vaccines in the same appointment to get protected against both viruses in just a few minutes. If this is not possible, it is better to get each vaccine as soon as you can rather than waiting.

## Resources





<b>Invitations</b>	<p>National invitation templates are available on the <a href="#">COVID-19 vaccination Futures</a> and <a href="#">CommsLink</a></p> <p>BSL invitation: <a href="#">NHS 119 - SignVideo : SignVideo</a></p> <p>Translated inserts and easy read invitations: <a href="#">NHS England » Seasonal vaccination invitation</a></p>
<b>Useful links</b>	<p><b><u>Winter vaccinations</u></b></p> <p><a href="#">Seasonal vaccinations and winter health</a></p> <p><b><u>Flu vaccinations</u></b></p> <p><a href="#">Flu vaccine - NHS</a></p> <p><a href="#">Child flu vaccine - NHS</a></p> <p><a href="#">Find a pharmacy that offers the NHS flu vaccine</a></p> <p><a href="#">Book or manage a free NHS flu vaccination at a pharmacy</a></p> <p><b><u>COVID-19 vaccinations</u></b></p> <p><a href="#">About the COVID-19 vaccine</a></p> <p><a href="#">Book, cancel or change a COVID-19 vaccination appointment</a></p> <p><a href="#">Getting a COVID-19 vaccine</a></p> <p><a href="#">Find a walk-in COVID-19 vaccination site - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Coronavirus » Local COVID-19 vaccination contacts (england.nhs.uk)</a></p>
<b>UKHSA resources</b>	<p><a href="#">Leaflet on flu for adults, parents and pregnant people</a></p> <p><a href="#">A guide to the COVID-19 autumn programme</a></p> <p><a href="#">Child flu leaflets and posters</a></p> <p><a href="#">GP template letter for inviting 2-3s</a></p> <p><a href="#">Easy read posters and leaflets on flu</a></p> <p><a href="#">Simple text flu leaflets for adults and children</a></p>

<b>Public-facing campaign resources</b>	NHSE and UKHSA social media cards, posters, digital screens and other resources to promote the offer to the public are available to order and download, on the <a href="#">Campaign Resource Centre</a>
<b>Staff-facing resources</b>	NHSE posters, leaflets and stickers to promote the offer to health and social care staff are available to order and download on the <a href="#">Campaign Resource Centre</a>
<b>LDA comms toolkit</b>	A toolkit for communicating the winter vaccine offer to people with a learning disability, produced by NHS England's Learning Disability and Autism team. Includes videos, scripts and social media content. Available on <a href="#">CommsLink</a>
<b>Script for spokespeople on child flu vaccines</b>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <p>Last year 6,000 under 5s ended up in hospital because of flu. The child flu vaccine reduces your child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds and helps prevent it spreading among vulnerable family and friends. The vaccine is usually given as a quick and painless spray up the nose. Book your 2 or 3 year old's vaccine at their GP practice or, if your child is of school age, make sure to look out for and sign their consent form. <i>Get your child vaccinated against flu. Get winter strong.</i></p>
<b>Script for spokespeople on winter vaccines in pregnancy</b>	<p><b>Pregnant women</b></p> <p>Getting flu or COVID-19 while pregnant increases the risk of admission to intensive care, could cause your baby to be born prematurely or have low birth weight, and can even lead to stillbirth or death</p> <p>The flu and COVID-19 vaccines help to protect you and your baby from serious illness and provides your baby with protection for the first few months of life. It's safe to have both vaccines during any stage of pregnancy, from the first few weeks up to your expected due date. <i>Get vaccinated. Get winter strong.</i></p>



NHSE social media cards with captions	
<p>For some, flu or COVID-19 can be very dangerous and even life-threatening. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of serious illness in colder months.</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p>→ <a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	
<p>For some, flu or COVID-19 can be very dangerous and even life-threatening. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of serious illness in colder months.</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p>→ <a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	
<p>Getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines is quick and easy — it takes just a few minutes.</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p>→ <a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	
<p>Immunity from previous flu and COVID-19 vaccines fades, and the viruses change over time.</p> <p>Top up your protection — even if you've had flu or COVID-19 or have been vaccinated before.</p> <p>Check if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p>→ <a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	



<p>If you're a paid or unpaid carer, seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations can protect you and those you care for.</p> <p>Book now. <a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">→ nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	 <p><b>NHS</b> <b>GET VACCINATED. GET WINTER STRONG.</b></p> <p>If you're a paid or unpaid carer, seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccines can protect you and those you care for</p>
<p>Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce your risk of serious illness if you have an underlying health condition.</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p><a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">→ nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	 <p><b>NHS</b> <b>GET VACCINATED. GET WINTER STRONG.</b></p> <p>Flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce your risk of serious illness if you have an underlying health condition</p>
<p>Getting the flu vaccine will mean you are less likely to catch flu and pass it on to your baby.</p> <p>Protect yourself and your baby this winter. Find out more and book now.</p> <p><a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">→ nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	 <p><b>NHS</b> <b>GET VACCINATED. GET WINTER STRONG.</b></p> <p>Getting the flu vaccine will mean you are less likely to catch flu and pass it on to your baby</p>
<p>Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are the most effective way for you to protect yourself and your baby against flu at any stage of your pregnancy.</p> <p>Find out if you're eligible and book now.</p> <p><a href="https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations">→ nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations</a></p>	 <p><b>NHS</b> <b>GET VACCINATED. GET WINTER STRONG.</b></p> <p>Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are the most effective way for you to protect yourself and your baby against these viruses</p>

If your child is 2 or 3 years old you can book a flu vaccination appointment at their GP surgery.

Protect your child against flu this winter. Find out more.

 [nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations](https://nhs.uk/seasonalvaccinations)



## FAQs

### **Flu and COVID-19**

#### **What is Influenza (flu)?**

Flu is caused by influenza viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs which are part of the respiratory system. There are several [symptoms](#) of flu including a sudden high temperature, an aching body and a dry cough. A full list of symptoms is available on the [NHS website](#). It often gets better on its own but can lead to serious illness. It is important to get the flu vaccine ahead of winter if you are eligible to protect yourself.

#### **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that is caused by a particular type of coronavirus that infects the windpipe and lungs which are part of the respiratory system. There are a range of [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 including a new continuous cough, shortness of breath and an aching body. The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses including flu and a full list of symptoms is available on the [NHS website](#). COVID-19 often gets better on its own but can lead to serious illness. It is important to get the COVID-19 vaccine ahead of winter if you are eligible to protect yourself.

#### **How do I stop flu and COVID-19 spreading?**

Flu and COVID-19 are both very infectious, spread by germs from coughs and sneezes. COVID-19 can be spread very easily through close contact with people who have the virus, for example via breathing and speaking. Flu and COVID-19 spread by person to person via small droplets containing the virus being released from an infected person and then picked up by another person by breathing these droplets in or touching surfaces covered in them.

The best way to avoid catching and spreading flu and COVID-19 is by getting vaccinated ahead of winter. You can help prevent the spread by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and encourage children to do so, washing your hands frequently or using hand gels and cleaning surfaces you use regularly to reduce the risk of picking up the viruses.

#### **What should I do if I think I have flu or COVID-19?**

The best way to avoid catching and spreading flu and COVID-19 is by getting vaccinated.

If you think that you have flu or COVID-19 you should:

- try to stay at home
- rest and sleep
- keep warm
- take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower your temperature and treat aches and pains
- drink plenty of fluids (water is best) to [avoid dehydration](#) (your pee should be light yellow and clear)

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should try and stay at home and avoid contact with other people until you feel better.

A pharmacist can give treatment advice. Please check on NHS.UK for further [advice](#) on how to look after yourself at home.

You may be at increased risk of getting seriously ill from flu and COVID-19, for example if you're pregnant, aged 65 and over, have certain health conditions or a weakened immune system. If you are in one of these categories and are showing symptoms, if your symptoms are getting worse or you don't think that you can look after yourself at home, [ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111](#).

You should call 999 or go to A&E if you or your child experience sudden chest pain, become very breathless, develop a rash, start coughing up blood or if your symptoms are making you very unwell.

### **Should I be worried about the new variant?**

The BA.2.86 variant was detected in the UK on Friday 18 August. It has been identified in Israel, Denmark and the US. There is currently one confirmed case in the UK in an individual with no travel history, which suggests a degree of community transmission within the UK. Identifying the extent of transmission will require further investigation and there is currently insufficient data to assess the severity compared to other variants.

In response to the findings, NHSE is taking pre-emptive measures to vaccinate people earlier than originally planned to help stop the spread and protect those most at risk from this variant.

The potential impact of BA.2.86 and its ability to evade the current available vaccines is difficult to estimate on the basis of limited available data worldwide. UKHSA will continue to monitor data relating to this variant both in the UK and internationally, as we do with all emergent and circulating variants, and will publish more detail when it is available.

## **Flu and COVID-19 vaccines**

### **Why should I get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?**

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines have good safety records and are an effective way to protect yourself from the flu and COVID-19 viruses.

While flu and COVID-19 can be unpleasant, for some it can be very dangerous and even life threatening, particularly people with certain health conditions, older people and pregnant women. For them, it can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia or can make existing conditions worse. Every winter, thousands die from flu and people can still get very ill or die from COVID-19.

Children aged under 5 have one of the highest hospitalisation rates for flu. Last year over 6,000 under 5s in England were hospitalised by flu, and many more needed care in accident and emergency. The vaccine reduces a child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds.

Having your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations will reduce your risk of serious illness and help you recover more quickly if you catch the viruses. Getting the vaccines while pregnant helps to protect you and your baby from complications if you catch these viruses. The vaccines have kept tens of thousands of people out of hospital and helped to save countless lives and they give you better protection than any immunity gained from previous infections. They also help protect your family and other people in your community, by helping to stop diseases spreading.

In winter, flu and COVID-19 spread more easily as we spend more time indoors. Getting these vaccines ahead of winter are two of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others around you safe and 'get winter strong'. The new BA.2.86 COVID-19 variant presents a greater risk now, which is why we are encouraging all eligible people to get their vaccines as soon as they can.

### **When should I get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?**

Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter as we spend more time indoors. Catching both viruses over winter increases the risk of serious illness even further. The new BA.2.86 COVID-19 variant presents a greater risk now, which is why we are encouraging all eligible people to get their vaccines as soon as they can.

All eligible adults are now able to book their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Eligible children will be able to get their flu vaccine from September as soon as the vaccine is available.

Eligible under-18s will be able to book the COVID-19 vaccine from October.

GP practices and pharmacies get the flu vaccine in batches to make sure that it is widely available. If you are eligible and cannot get an appointment, ask if you can book an appointment for when more vaccines are available.

### **If I have had a flu or COVID-19 vaccine before, do I need to get it again?**

If you are eligible for the flu or COVID-19 vaccine based on the JCVI recommendations, it is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or COVID-19 before, as immunity fades over time and flu and COVID-19 viruses change each year.

The vaccines give you additional protection to that gained from previous infections. If you have had recent COVID-19 you will still get extra protection from the vaccine.

### **I thought I was supposed to get vaccinated in October to make sure that I am protected through the coldest winter months?**

This season's flu and COVID-19 vaccinations were originally planned to start from early October to maximise protection for patients right across the coldest winter months. This date was brought forward to September, earlier than originally planned, to help protect those most at risk given to the new risk presented by the BA.2.86 variant.



We brought forwards both flu and COVID-19 vaccines as, if you get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, the symptoms are likely to be more serious. We will be working to ensure as many eligible people as possible are vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 as quickly as possible.

### **Could I still get flu and COVID-19 after having the vaccines?**

Like all medicines, no vaccine is 100% guarantee of not catching the virus – some people may still get flu or COVID-19 despite getting vaccinated but this should be less severe with milder symptoms. It may take a few days for your body to build up protection from the vaccines. Having your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations will reduce your risk of serious illness and may help you recover more quickly if you catch the viruses.

### **Why do I keep needing to have further doses of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The COVID-19 vaccine is given to top up the protection in those at higher risk from severe COVID-19 illness to help prevent people being hospitalised or dying from COVID-19 during colder months. During the pandemic, COVID-19 disproportionately affected those in older age groups, residents in care homes for older adults, and those with certain underlying health conditions, particularly those who are severely immunosuppressed which is why we vaccinate them regularly to 'top up' their protection.

### **How is it decided who is eligible to get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines for free on the NHS each year?**

The flu and COVID-19 vaccine programmes aim to reduce the number of people that get seriously ill and reduce the spread of the viruses. The government decide which groups will be eligible for free vaccines on the NHS. Their decision is based on the independent advice of clinical experts in the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) who review the latest clinical evidence and data.

### **Which COVID-19 vaccine will I be offered?**

The NHS is offering different COVID-19 vaccines in line with the advice of scientists on JCVI. All COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in line with rigorous standards and found to give good protection against the virus.

### **Can I have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines together?**

The JCVI has advised that, for most people, it is fine to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time. Where possible, we encourage you to get both vaccines in the same appointment to ensure you are protected against both viruses.

If this is not possible, we encourage you to get each vaccine as soon as you can, rather than waiting to get both at the same time. If you receive both vaccines in one appointment but originally booked two, please do cancel the other appointment so that it becomes available for someone else.

### **Are the vaccines safe?**

The flu and COVID-19 vaccines have a good safety record, and their side effects are generally mild and do not last for more than a few days. Your safety will always come first and there are rigorous safety standards that have to be met through the approval process.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the official UK regulator are globally recognised for requiring the highest standards of safety, quality and effectiveness for medicines and vaccines. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process. Each of the vaccines are tested on tens of thousands of people across the world. They are tested on both men and women, on people from different ethnic backgrounds, and of all age groups.

Like any other vaccine or medicine, the flu and COVID-19 vaccines are being continuously monitored for safety – the effected benefits of the vaccines far outweigh risk in the majority of patients. You and your healthcare professional can report any suspected side effects through the tried and trusted Yellow Card Scheme.

### **How do vaccines work?**

Vaccines teach your immune system how to create antibodies that protect you from diseases. It's usually much safer for your immune system to learn this through vaccination than by catching the diseases and treating them. Once your immune system knows how to fight a disease, it can often protect you..

### **Are there any side effects from the vaccines?**

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines have a good safety record. All adult flu and COVID-19 vaccines are given by injection into the muscle of the upper arm.

Most side effects are mild and only last for a day or so, such as:

- having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around a day or two following the vaccination
- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches, or mild flu like symptoms.

Try these tips to help reduce the discomfort:

- rest
- continue to move your arm regularly
- take a painkiller, such as [paracetamol](#) or [ibuprofen](#) – some people, including those who are pregnant, should not take ibuprofen unless a doctor recommends it.

Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week. If you experience a high temperature, if your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, you can call NHS 111.

Worldwide, there have been very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after some COVID-19 vaccinations. These cases have been seen mostly in younger men within several days after vaccination. Most of these people recovered and felt better following rest and simple treatments.

You should seek medical advice urgently if, after vaccination, you experience:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath



- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme:

- online at [Yellow Card Scheme](#)
- by downloading and using the Yellow Card app on [Apple](#) or [Android](#)
- by calling the Yellow Card scheme on 0800 731 6789 (9am to 5pm)

### **Can I have the vaccine if I feel unwell?**

If you are unwell, wait until you have recovered to have your vaccine. You should not attend an appointment if you have a fever or think you might be infectious to others.

### **Should I get the vaccines if I think I have already had flu or COVID-19?**

If you think you've already had flu or COVID-19, once you've recovered you should still get the vaccines as they will still help protect you.

### **Is there anyone that shouldn't get the vaccines?**

Almost everybody can have the vaccines, but you should not be vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergy (eg. anaphylaxis) to any of the flu or COVID-19 vaccines, or any of their ingredients – you should discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

If you are allergic to eggs you may not be able to have certain types of flu vaccine – check with your immuniser. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.

### **I've only just had my first or second COVID-19 vaccine, can I have the autumn booster jab?**

No, the JCVI advises that the booster vaccine should be offered no earlier than three months after completion of the primary vaccine course.

### **I haven't yet had the COVID-19 vaccination, can I still get my first jabs?**

Only children aged 6 months to 4 years old who are at increased risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 can currently get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Since the end of the spring 2023 COVID-19 campaign, the primary course of COVID-19 vaccine became a targeted offer to those at higher risk and only during seasonal campaigns. This means during this autumn winter programme, those eligible for the primary course COVID-19 vaccination will be the same as those eligible for the seasonal vaccine.

The main exception to this would be unvaccinated individuals aged five years and above who become or have recently become severely immunosuppressed. These individuals should be considered for primary vaccination, regardless of the time of year. Clinical judgement should be used to decide on the best timing to commence vaccination.

### **Do I need to receive the same type of vaccine or booster as my previous ones?**

No, all COVID-19 vaccines authorised for use by the NHS are effective and provide a strong booster response. When you attend your appointment, the NHS will offer you a safe, effective vaccine.

### **What type of flu vaccine will I be given?**

For adults, there are [several types of flu vaccine](#) depending upon your age.

- adults are offered an injectable vaccine. There are different types, including low-egg and egg-free ones
- adults aged 65 years and over – the most common flu vaccine contains an extra ingredient to help your immune system make a stronger response to the vaccine

Most children over the age of 2 are offered a nasal spray vaccine – this is given as a quick and painless spray up the nose. Those aged under 2 and a small number of children due to pre-existing medical conditions or treatments cannot have the nasal spray and are offered protection through an injected vaccine instead.

### **What type of COVID-19 vaccine will I be given?**

There are several different COVID-19 vaccines in use in the UK. They have all met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness. Most people can have any of the COVID-19 vaccines and will be offered a vaccine that gives protection from more than one type of COVID-19. You cannot choose which vaccine you have.

Some people are only offered certain vaccines, for example:

- if you're pregnant
- if you're under 18 years old
- if you're 75 years old or over
- in very rare cases if you've had a severe allergic reaction to one of the common vaccines you may be referred to a specialist clinic for an alternative COVID-19 vaccine

### **I've heard that the COVID-19 vaccine given may change?**

All COVID-19 vaccinations offered by the NHS have been advised for use this autumn/winter by the experts in the Joint Committee for Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI). The vaccines have all been tested in line with rigorous standards and have been found to give good protection against the virus. The new BA.2.86 'pirola' COVID-19 variant presents a greater risk now, which is why the NHS is encouraging all eligible people to get their vaccines as soon as they can.

### **Eligibility and how to book**

#### **When should I get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?**

Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily in winter as we spend more time indoors. Catching both viruses over winter increases the risk of serious illness even further. The new BA.2.86 COVID-19 variant presents a greater risk now, which is why we are encouraging all eligible people to get their vaccines as soon as they can.

All eligible adults are now able to book their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, you do not need to wait to be invited.

The NHS has been offering the flu vaccine to children from September to protect them and help prevent the spread of the virus. This is because children are more likely to pass this onto others including elderly or vulnerable relatives.

Eligible under-18s will be able to book the COVID-19 vaccine from October.

GP practices and pharmacies get the flu vaccine in batches to make sure that it is widely available. If you are eligible and cannot get an appointment, ask if you can book an appointment for when more vaccines are available.

### **Who can get both winter vaccines?**

Those who can get both vaccines through the NHS will include everyone aged 65 and over, pregnant women, care home residents, [people with certain health conditions](#), frontline health and care staff, unpaid carers and household contacts of those at higher risk.

### **Who can get the flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine is offered to people most at risk of getting seriously ill from flu or who are most likely to pass flu to other people at risk. The following people are eligible for the free flu vaccine this season:

- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2023
- all school aged children (from Reception to Year 11)
- those aged 6 months of age upwards in a clinical risk group (as set out in the [Green Book](#))
- people that are pregnant
- those aged 65 years and over
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers in receipt of a carer's allowance, or who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- those that live with someone who is more likely to get infections (such as someone living with HIV, has had a transplant or is having certain treatments for cancer, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis)
- frontline workers in a social care setting that do not have access to occupational health

### **Which health conditions make me eligible for a flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine is offered to anyone with a serious health condition, including:

- respiratory conditions, ie asthma, chronic pulmonary disease, including emphysema and bronchitis, cystic fibrosis
- diabetes
- heart conditions such as coronary heart disease or heart failure
- being very overweight – a BMI of 40 or above
- chronic kidney disease
- liver disease, such as hepatitis
- neurological conditions, ie Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
- a learning disability

- problems with your spleen, eg sickle cell
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions ie HIV and AIDs or taking steroids or chemotherapy

A full list of clinical risk groups is included in Chapter 19 of the [Green Book](#). If you have a condition that is not included in the list, you can speak to your GP who can offer a flu vaccine if they think you are at risk of serious complications from catching flu.

### **Who can get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Seasonal COVID-19 vaccines are offered to those at increased risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 – this may be due to a health condition or age. JCVI has recommended that the following groups should be able to get a COVID-19 vaccine this autumn/winter:

- residents and staff in a care home for older adults
- people that are pregnant
- all adults aged 65 years and over
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as defined in tables 3 and 4 of the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green book](#)
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts, as defined in the Green book, of people with immunosuppression
- persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers, as defined in the Green book

### **Which health conditions make me eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination?**

The COVID-19 vaccine is offered to those with a serious health condition. Those that can get the COVID-19 vaccine due to a health condition are broadly similar to those that can get a flu vaccine including:

- respiratory conditions, ie poorly controlled asthma, chronic pulmonary disease, including emphysema and bronchitis, cystic fibrosis
- diabetes
- heart conditions such as coronary heart disease or heart failure
- being very overweight – a BMI of 40 or above
- chronic kidney disease
- liver disease, such as hepatitis
- neurological conditions, ie Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
- a learning disability
- those with a severe mental illness
- problems with your spleen, eg sickle cell
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions ie HIV and AIDs or taking steroids or chemotherapy

A full list of clinical risk groups is included in tables 3 and 4 in Chapter 14a of the [Green Book](#).

### **Will I be invited to get my winter vaccines?**

You may be invited to get your winter vaccines by the NHS nationally or by your GP practice through a letter, text or email. If you are eligible for the vaccine, you do not need to wait to be invited, you can go ahead and book. If you receive an invitation from the NHS and have already been vaccinated this season, do not worry, sometimes there is a delay in the information flowing through and you do not need to do anything.

### **How can I book my winter vaccines?**

Adults can get their COVID-19 vaccination by:

- Online at [www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination](https://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination)
- Using the NHS App
- By calling 119 to book at one of the same sites if you don't have online access

To get your flu vaccination from now:

- By contacting your GP practice
- By finding your nearest pharmacy offering the vaccine at [www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy](https://www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy)

If you need support:

- If you can't get online, phone 119 for help arranging your vaccinations. Interpreters will be available on request
- If you usually get your care at home, please contact your GP practice to arrange a home visit with a local NHS service.
- If you are housebound or are not able to travel to a vaccination centre, your local NHS services will be in touch to make arrangements.
- If you have difficulties communicating or hearing, or are a British Sign Language (BSL) user you can go [online at NHS.UK](https://online.nhs.uk), use textphone 18001 119 or the [NHS BSL interpreter service](https://www.nhs.uk/bsl-interpreter-service).

### **Where will I get my winter vaccines?**

This depends where you book your appointment but adults can get their flu vaccine through their GP practices or a community pharmacy. Pregnant women can also get their flu vaccine through their maternity service. Eligible children under 5 will get their flu vaccine through their GP and school age children will be offered their flu vaccine through their school age vaccination services so will either get the vaccine in school or at a community clinic.

People will be able to have their COVID-19 vaccination in a community pharmacy, vaccination centre or they may be invited by their GP practice.

Eligible people can choose to book an appointment to have both their flu and COVID-19 vaccines together in one appointment by booking through the NHS website.

Residents in care homes will be offered their vaccines in their care home.

Health and social care staff will be offered their vaccines through their employer.

### **Winter vaccines in children**

#### **Why does my child need to get the flu vaccine?**

Children have been prioritised to get the flu vaccine from September to protect them and help stop the virus spreading to others. Children aged under 5 have one of the highest hospitalisation rates for flu. Last year over 6,000 under 5s in England were hospitalised by flu, and many more needed care in accident and emergency. The vaccine reduces a child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds. The vaccine is usually given as a quick and painless spray up the nose.

### **Why does my child need the seasonal COVID-19 vaccine?**

The seasonal COVID-19 vaccine is offered to protect those most at risk of serious illness from the virus.

### **Which children can get the flu and seasonal COVID-19 vaccines?**

The [flu vaccine is offered to most children](#) including all aged 2 and 3 years old, school aged children from reception to year 11 and those aged 6 months to 17 years old with certain health conditions.

Children aged 5 years and over with [certain health conditions](#), those aged 12 and over that are household contacts of people with immunosuppression and carers aged 16 and over will be able to get the seasonal COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccinations for children aged 6 months to 4 years are managed at a local level. Children under 12 years old will be given smaller doses than older children and adults.

### **How do I book my child's winter vaccination?**

If your child is aged 12-17 and eligible for a seasonal COVID-19 vaccine, you will be able to book this online at [www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination](http://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination) or they can visit a walk in clinic. Those aged 5-11 that are eligible will be able to get their vaccine from 5<sup>th</sup> October.

If your child is aged 2 or 3 years old or if they are aged 6 months to 2 years with certain health conditions you can book a flu vaccination appointment at their GP practice.

If your child is of school age, you do not need to book an appointment for them to get a flu vaccination. They will be vaccinated in schools or community clinics through the school aged immunisation service. Parents should wait to be invited and complete the necessary consent documentation accordingly. If your child is in a clinical risk group please contact your GP if you would like your child to receive the flu vaccine earlier in the season.

### **Where will my child receive their winter vaccines?**

Your child will receive their COVID-19 vaccine at a local vaccination centre or community pharmacy.

For the flu vaccine:

<b>2 or 3 years old</b>	GP practice
<b>6 months to 17 years in clinical risk group</b>	GP practice (or can receive in school/community clinic if school-aged)
<b>School aged children in reception to year 11</b>	School or community clinic



### **When can I book my child's winter vaccinations?**

If your child is aged 2-3 years or aged 6 months – 17 years of age and in a clinical at risk group we encourage you to book your child's flu vaccine as soon as the vaccine becomes available from September to ensure that your child is protected ahead of winter and to help prevent the spread of the virus.

Children aged 5 and over that are eligible for the seasonal COVID-19 vaccine will be able to get the vaccine from October.

### **What flu vaccine will my child receive?**

- Most children over the age of 2 are offered a nasal spray vaccine – this is given as a quick and painless spray up the nose.
- A small number cannot have it due to pre-existing medical conditions or treatments and are offered protection through an injected vaccine instead.
- The nasal spray contains small traces of porcine gelatine. For those who may not accept the use of porcine gelatine in medicines, an injectable vaccine is available. If your child is aged between 6 months and 2 years old and is in a clinical risk group for flu, they will be offered an injected flu vaccine as the nasal spray is not licensed for children under the age of 2.

### **What COVID-19 vaccine will my child receive?**

In line with the advice of scientists, they will receive Comirnaty 10 (XBB.1.5). Like all COVID-19 vaccines offered by the NHS, it has a good safety record, side-effects are generally mild and do not last for more than a few days.

### **Are there any children that shouldn't get the nasal flu vaccine?**

Some children will be offered the injected flu vaccine if they have:

- a severely weakened immune system
- asthma that's being treated with steroid tablets or has needed intensive care in hospital
- a flare-up of asthma symptoms (such as they've been wheezy in the past 72 hours or are currently wheezy) and need to use a reliever inhaler more than usual
- had an allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past
- a condition that needs salicylate treatment

Children will also be offered the injected flu vaccine if they live with somebody with a severely weakened immune system who requires isolation (for example, someone who has had a bone marrow transplant).

If you're not sure, check with the school aged immunisation service team, the nurse or GP at your practice, or the specialist if your child has hospital care.

The nasal spray vaccine contains small traces of pork gelatine. If you do not accept the use of pork gelatine in medical products, the injected vaccine is available as an alternative.

### **Side effects of the children's flu vaccine**

The nasal spray flu vaccine for children has an excellent safety record. Most side effects are mild and do not last long, such as:

- a runny or blocked nose



- a headache
- tiredness
- loss of appetite

## **Winter vaccines in pregnancy**

### **Should I get the flu and seasonal COVID-19 vaccines whilst I'm pregnant?**

If you're pregnant you're at higher risk of getting seriously ill from flu and COVID-19.

There is good evidence that pregnant women have a higher chance of developing complications if they get flu, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. One of the most common complications of flu is bronchitis, a chest infection that can become serious and develop into pneumonia.

If you have flu or COVID-19 while you're pregnant, it could cause your baby to be born prematurely or have a low birthweight, it increases the need for admission to intensive care for mum and baby and may even lead to stillbirth or death. If you get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, the symptoms are likely to be more serious.

Getting your winter vaccines is the safest and most effective way for women to protect themselves and their baby against flu and COVID-19 and it also reduces the risk of having a stillbirth. The antibodies your body produces in response to the vaccine can also give your baby protection against flu and COVID-19 which lasts for the first few months of their lives.

It's safe to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines during any stage of pregnancy, from the first few weeks up to your expected due date. It's also safe for women who are breastfeeding to have the vaccines. There's no evidence flu and COVID-19 vaccination increases the risk of having a miscarriage, pre-term birth or other complications in your pregnancy. It's strongly recommended that you get vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 ahead of winter to protect you and your baby.

### **Can I get the flu and COVID-19 vaccine at the same time whilst pregnant?**

It's safe to receive the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time. You may be offered them at the same time or you may be offered, or to decide to have them, separately. Where possible, we encourage you to get both vaccines in the same appointment to save you time and ensure you are protected against both viruses. If this is not possible, we encourage you to get each vaccine as soon as you can, rather than waiting to get both at the same time. If you receive both vaccines in one appointment but originally booked two, please do cancel the other appointment so that it becomes available for someone else.

### **Can I have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as the whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine?**

Yes, you can have the vaccines at the same time as the whooping cough vaccine (pertussis vaccine), but do not delay your winter vaccines so you can have all of the vaccines at the same time. Pregnant women are at risk of severe illness from flu and COVID-19 at any stage of pregnancy, so you need to have the vaccines as soon as possible. The best time to get vaccinated against whooping cough is from 16 weeks up to 32 weeks of pregnancy. If you miss having the vaccine for any reason, you can still have it up until you go into labour.

### **What winter vaccines will I receive whilst pregnant?**

You will be offered a vaccine that is suitable for you. If you have any questions, you can discuss these with your GP practice or maternity team.

### **When can I receive the flu and COVID-19 vaccines?**

You can book the COVID-19 vaccines from 18 September, and flu vaccinations can now be booked through your GP practice or local pharmacy. The COVID-19 vaccine is available up until 15 December, but there may be opportunities to have the vaccine after this date, but we would encourage you to book during this time if possible. The flu vaccine is available up until the end of March if you find out that you are pregnant later in the flu season.

### **How can I book my winter vaccines?**

From 18 September, you can book the COVID-19 vaccine and flu vaccinations can now be booked through your GP practice or local pharmacy.

For the COVID-19 vaccine, you can book this online at [www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination](https://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination) (where, from October, you may be asked if you want a flu vaccination at the same appointment) or via the NHS App.

For the flu vaccine, you can book to get your vaccine at your GP practice or community pharmacy. You can find your nearest pharmacy offering the vaccine at [www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy](https://www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy). In some areas, midwives can give the flu vaccine at the antenatal clinic. It's a good idea to get vaccinated against flu as soon as possible after the vaccine becomes available. Do not worry if you find that you're pregnant later in the flu season – you can have the vaccine up until March if you have not already had it.

### **Winter vaccines in frontline health and social care workers**

#### **Why should healthcare workers receive the flu and seasonal COVID-19 vaccines?**

To maintain a high level of protection through the coming winter, frontline healthcare workers will be offered the flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and those in their care who are most at risk.

For some, flu and COVID-19 are unpleasant illnesses. But for many, particularly those with certain health conditions, they can be very dangerous and even life threatening. Every winter, thousands die from flu and people can still get very ill or die from COVID-19. Catching both viruses increases the risk of serious illness even further.

As a healthcare worker, you're more likely to be exposed to the viruses. You will also be caring for people who may be at greater risk from these viruses. Being healthy doesn't reduce your risk of getting these viruses or passing them on. You can have flu and COVID-19 without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends, colleagues and patients, many of whom may be at increased risk of serious illness if they get these viruses.

Vaccines are our best protection against flu and COVID-19. Over the last few years they have kept tens of thousands of people out of hospital and helped to save countless lives. Getting your vaccines is straight forward and while some people may experience some mild short lived side effects, they will keep you protected and if you do run into these viruses, your

symptoms are likely to be milder and you may recover faster, cutting your risk of being hospitalised.

Getting both vaccines ahead of winter, when the viruses spread more easily, are two of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others around you safe, so you can continue to be there for the people you care for.

**Why do I need a flu and seasonal COVID-19 vaccine again, when I had this last winter?**

It is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or COVID-19 before, as immunity fades over time and flu and COVID-19 viruses change each year. The vaccines give you additional protection to that gained from previous infections and gives you good protection from being seriously ill or needing to go to hospital if you catch flu or COVID-19.

**When should I get my vaccines as a health and social care worker?**

The seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available from September. We encourage you to get both vaccines in the same visit where possible, for protection against both viruses in just a few minutes. If this is not possible, it is better to get each vaccine as soon as you can, rather than waiting.

**Is the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster mandatory for frontline health and social care staff?**

No, having the flu and COVID-19 vaccines is not compulsory for health and care staff, but is an important protection for them and those they come into contact with. Local employers will be working hard to ensure all staff can get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines this autumn and winter, and we are confident that most of our staff will choose to protect themselves and those around them by getting the vaccine.

**How do I get my flu vaccine as a frontline health and social care worker?**

The flu vaccine should be provided to frontline health and social care workers by their employer as part of the organisation's policy to prevent the transmission of infection. Employers may offer the flu vaccine to staff at their place of work or from another local service. Your employer will provide more information on how to get your flu vaccine.

Social care workers who are in direct contact with people who receive care should also have the flu vaccine provided by their employer. If your employer is not able to offer the flu vaccine, you can get this through a complementary NHS scheme. This scheme applies to specific frontline workers in a social care setting including registered domiciliary care providers, voluntary managed hospice providers and those that receive direct payments or personal health budgets.

Through the complementary NHS scheme, you can book your vaccine through your GP practice, local pharmacy or the flu national booking system which will appear online here. You do not need to present your ID but if you ask your employer to provide you with a letter identifying you as a social care professional it may make things easier on the day.

You may be offered your COVID-19 vaccine at the same time, or separately. If you are offered either vaccine, get them as soon as possible.

**How do I get my COVID-19 vaccine as a frontline health and social care worker?**

The COVID-19 vaccine may be offered through your employer or you can book the COVID-19 vaccine through the National Booking Service or by calling 119. Some areas will also offer local walk-in vaccinations. All eligible frontline staff will continue to be able to self-declare online, on the NHS App or through 119.

You may be offered your flu vaccine at the same time, or separately. If you are offered either vaccine, get them as soon as possible.