



Childhood influenza vaccination programme

Information for primary schools

We are grateful for your school's ongoing support with the influenza programme as being able to offer the vaccine in school is the most effective way to deliver immunisations to school aged children.

This factsheet is for headteachers and school staff and contains answers to a number of questions staff may have about the nasal spray influenza (flu) vaccination offered to children in primary schools this autumn.

Please do not distribute copies of this document to children or parents/guardians, as they will receive information at the appropriate time from the school nurse/immunisation team.

Background

The childhood influenza (flu) vaccination programme is based on independent expert advice, from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) that advises the UK governments on vaccination policies. Flu vaccine has been offered in primary schools in Wales since 2015/16.

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 health problems, especially in young children, sometimes resulting in hospital admission. 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 shows that the children's programme has a positive impact on reducing the levels of flu, both for the vaccinated children and the wider community, with fewer GP consultations, hospital admissions, and emergency department attendances in areas of the UK where the children's flu programme is well established.

The best flu vaccine for children is a nasal spray vaccine called *Fluenz® Tetra*. Nasal spray flu vaccine has an excellent safety record, it has been used in the UK school programme for the past five years and more than a hundred thousand doses have been given.

Flu vaccination of school-aged children may also help reduce absenteeism amongst pupils and staff.

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

During the autumn school term all children in primary school, from reception class to school year 6, will be offered the vaccination as part of a school based programme.

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

Children aged two or three years old on 31 August 2019 will be offered the vaccination at their GP surgery (i.e. children born on or between 1 September 2015 and 31 August 2017). Arrangements for three year olds may differ locally.

Children aged four years old on 31 August 2019 who have not started school, when flu vaccine is offered in school, can get their vaccine from their GP surgery.

Nasal spray flu vaccine is not suitable for children younger than two years old.

When does the nasal spray flu vaccination need to be given?

Flu vaccinations should ideally be given before flu viruses start to circulate in the community (this is generally not before mid December).

Annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

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.

When will schools be contacted?

Your health board will contact local schools sometime between June and September. They will explain how (and when) the programme will be delivered in your school.

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

Local arrangements will be made by your school nursing team who will be in touch to agree what will be required. As in previous years, a letter to parents, a leaflet and consent form will need to be distributed to all pupils due to receive the vaccine. The completed consent form should be returned to school prior to vaccination.

A suitable room will need to be available for the vaccination session. School nurse/immunisation teams will work with schools to help minimise disruption.

Schools will be asked to help with tasks that cannot easily be done by the school nurse/immunisation 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/immunisation team may need to liaise closely with the school when children have similar names.

Successful 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 vaccines will be delivered by an immunisation 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.

Some 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 immunisation team is still on site seek advice directly from them promptly.
- if the immunisation team have left the site, manage according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school. After appropriate arrangements have been made for the child, contact the immunisation team to ensure that they are aware of the event.

Can you catch flu from children who have had the nasal spray flu vaccine?

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

Although children are known to shed flu virus for a few days after the vaccination, it is not the same as natural flu infection. The virus shed after vaccination does not survive for long outside the body and is less able to spread from person to person than natural flu virus.

Excluding children from school during the period when flu vaccine is being offered, or in the following weeks, is not considered necessary. The only exception to this would be the tiny number of children who are extremely immunocompromised (for example following a bone marrow transplant). These children would not normally be attending school due to the high risk of being in contact with a variety of infections, including natural flu infection.

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

Most children are fine following flu vaccination and serious side effects are uncommon, but some children 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 school nurse/immunisation team, school staff will not be expected to answer questions regarding this.

The nasal spray flu vaccine is 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.

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

Parental consent will be arranged via a letter, information leaflet and consent form which the school nurse/immunisation 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 school nurse/immunisation team.

Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

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

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

There is no expectation that parents will 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 their flu vaccine in school but the child is absent on the day of the school session, the school nurse/immunisation 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 a flu vaccine?

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.

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

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 pages

www.beatflu.org

www.curwchfiliw.org

2019 Children's flu leaflet will be available soon 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