



Childhood influenza vaccination programme 2018-19 Information for primary schools

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

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

Please do not photocopy this document to give to children or parents/guardians, as they will receive information at the appropriate time from the healthcare team.

Background

In September 2013, a routine childhood influenza (flu) vaccination programme was introduced in Wales. The programme is based on independent expert advice, from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) that advises the UK governments on vaccination policies.

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 flu levels, both for the vaccinated children and the wider community. There has been less illness in the community in areas where all children from the age of 2 to 10 have a flu vaccine, with fewer GP consultations, hospital admissions, and emergency department attendances.

The flu vaccine offered to most children is a nasal spray vaccine called *Fluenz*[®] *Tetra*. This is the best flu vaccine for children. 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 2018 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 2018 will be offered the vaccination at their GP surgery (i.e. children born on or between 1 September 2014 and 31 August 2016). Arrangements for three year olds may differ locally.

Children aged four years old on 31 August 2018 who have not started school, when flu vaccine is offered in school, can obtain 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).

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.

Annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

When will schools be contacted?

Your local health board will contact schools sometime between June and September 2018. Someone may have already been in contact with you. They will explain how (and when) the programme will be delivered in your school.

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

Local arrangements for your school will be made by your school nursing team who will be in touch to agree what will be required. A parental letter, leaflet and consent form will need to be distributed to all pupils due to receive the vaccine, and the completed consent form returned to school prior to vaccination. A suitable room will need to be available for the vaccination session. Healthcare teams will work with schools to minimise disruption.

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

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 programme will be delivered by a healthcare 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 simple nasal spray. One spray is given up each nostril. The child can breathe normally while the vaccine is being administered.

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 healthcare team is still on site seek advice directly from them.
- if the healthcare team have left the site, manage according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school. After appropriate arrangements have made for the child, contact the healthcare 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 virus for a few days after vaccination, it is not the same as natural flu infection, which spreads easily. 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 the 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, which spread easily in schools.

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

Serious side effects are uncommon, but children may 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 healthcare team, school staff will not be expected to answer questions regarding this.

Nasal spray vaccine will be 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.

Are children protected from flu for life after having the nasal spray flu vaccine?

No. Flu viruses can change and a new vaccine is made each year to match the viruses that are expected to be circulating that winter. Annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

How will parent/guardian consent be obtained?

Parental consent will be arranged via a letter, information leaflet and consent form which the healthcare 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 healthcare team.

Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

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

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 flu vaccine in school but the child is absent on the day of the school session, the healthcare 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.curwchfliw.org

2018 Children's flu leaflet will be available 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