



Flu immunisation guidance

Free flu immunisation for social care workers

The government is grateful for the dedication and commitment shown by all our social care* workers and the organisations involved in keeping people with care and support needs safe during the pandemic. Colleagues across the sector have risen to this unprecedented challenge and gone above and beyond the call of duty to keep those they care for safe.

As the sector continues to deal with these challenges it is important that the focus on the flu virus is not lost. We want to ensure that the sector is as well-protected from the flu virus as it can be, including both for the staff within it and the people being cared for. Securing access to the flu vaccine is the best way to do this.

Flu vaccination for social care staff directly working with people clinically vulnerable to flu is strongly encouraged. We have developed this guidance to support staff to ensure there is high uptake of the flu vaccine this season. Those eligible for a flu vaccination include all social care workers and social care workers working with children who are clinically vulnerable to flu.



Those eligible for a flu vaccination

All social care workers who are in direct contact with people who receive care and support should get the vaccine, including:

- those working in a registered residential care or nursing home and who are directly involved in the care and support of people
- those working for a registered homecare provider and who are directly involved in the care and support of people
- those working for a voluntary managed hospice provider
- those employed through personal budgets and or personal health budgets, such as personal assistants

Why you should get a flu vaccination

Getting the vaccine will help to protect you, your family, and the people you care for from getting the flu.

For people in at-risk groups, such as those aged 65 or over or with an underlying health condition, flu can be a serious disease and can cause death.

As a social care worker, you will be caring for many people in these at-risk groups. Getting the vaccine will mean you are much less likely to spread the flu to those you care for and will help to protect them and yourself this winter.

Vaccination reduces the spread of flu among staff and people receiving care and support, keeping social care services running and reducing the burden on the NHS during the winter. This is true every year, but it is particularly important this year, as coronavirus (COVID-19) is still in circulation.

How to get a flu vaccination

Your employer can support in ensuring that you receive a flu vaccination. They may do this by arranging for you to be vaccinated at your place of work or by arranging for you to be vaccinated off-site. Your employer can let you know which scheme they are running. If not, please ask them.

In instances where an employer can not provide a flu vaccination scheme, you can still receive the flu vaccination free of charge from a GP practice or pharmacy through the complementary NHS scheme if you're a social care worker employed by a:

- registered residential care or nursing home
- registered homecare organisation
- a voluntary managed hospice provider

Or if you provide social care through direct payments or personal health budgets. There is specific [flu vaccination guidance for personal care assistants](#).

Identification needed to prove you are a social care worker

You do not need to present your ID at your local GP practice or pharmacy. However, we will be advising employers to issue staff with a letter identifying you as a social care worker to make the process as easy as possible for you.

When to get the flu vaccine

The best time to have a flu vaccine is in the autumn, before flu starts to circulate. The majority of vaccines are given from September to the end of November but it is still possible to get a flu vaccination through to the end of January.

There is enough flu vaccine for everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated. If you are eligible and are asked to wait, there is still time to get vaccinated at a later opportunity.

Safety of the flu vaccination

The flu vaccines used in the national NHS programme have a good safety record. The vaccines are thoroughly tested before they are made available in England.

You may have a mild fever and aching muscles a few days after having the vaccine and your arm may be sore at the injection site. Further information is available on possible [side effects](#).

Those who shouldn't get a flu vaccination

Most adults can have the injected flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past. If you are uncertain whether you should avoid it due to a medical condition, you should speak to your GP.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine injection if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs. Ask a GP or pharmacist for a low-egg or egg-free vaccine.

If you're ill with a high temperature, it's best to wait until you're better before having the flu vaccine.



Effectiveness of the flu vaccine

The flu vaccine is the best protection we have against flu, which can cause serious illness and death in at-risk groups.

Studies have shown that the flu vaccine will help prevent you from getting flu.

Flu is caused by a number of different strains of the flu virus and the vaccine only protects against those that are most likely to cause flu during this year's flu season. As a result, there's not a 100% guarantee that you won't get flu if you've been vaccinated.

However, even if you do get flu after being vaccinated, studies have shown that you're likely to have a much milder and shorter illness.

You cannot catch flu from the flu vaccine because there are no live viruses in the vaccine.

Getting the flu vaccination every year

The strains of flu in circulation change every year, so the protection from the vaccine you had last year will decrease over time.

New flu vaccines are produced every year to protect against the strains most likely to be in circulation, which is why people are advised to be vaccinated every year.

Agreeing to be vaccinated

It's important that as many health and social care workers as possible get the vaccine – it protects you, your family, and the people you care for from the flu – but if you don't want to have the vaccine for whatever reason, you don't have to have it.

* All frontline health and social care workers who are directly involved in the care of clinically vulnerable patients/clients, and who are at increased risk from exposure to influenza, should receive a vaccination this season. This should be provided by their employer, in order to meet their responsibility to protect their staff and patients and ensure the overall safe running of services. Employers should commission a service which makes access easy to the vaccine for all frontline staff, encourage staff to get vaccinated, and monitor the delivery of their programmes.

Where employee-led occupational health services are not in place, the NHS will continue to support vaccination of social care and hospice workers employed by registered residential or domiciliary care providers, as well as those employed through Direct Payment and/or Personal Health Budgets to deliver domiciliary care to patients and service users. Vaccination will be available through community pharmacy or their registered general practice. This scheme is intended to complement, not replace, any established occupational health schemes that employers have in place to offer flu vaccination to their workforce.

