

# Flu Vaccine

## Information for Healthcare Workers



Public Health  
Advice



Protect yourself.  
Protect others.



# Information for Healthcare Workers

## Flu Vaccine 2020-2021

Influenza (flu) is a serious viral infection that can be life-threatening.

By getting the flu vaccine, you protect yourself, and you also prevent the spread of flu to people around you.

This year it's especially important to get the flu vaccine to stop the spread of flu; infection with both flu and COVID-19 could be fatal for your patients.

You can save lives by getting the flu vaccine.



## What is seasonal influenza (flu)?

Flu is a very infectious viral illness of the respiratory tract. Most people with flu are sick for 5-7 days with a high temperature, sore throat, muscle pains, fatigue and headache.

Flu can cause a more serious illness which may be life-threatening. Every year in Ireland 200-500 people die from flu and thousands of people need admission to hospital.

## What are the complications of flu?

Anyone can get sick with flu and serious complications from flu can happen at any age.

Severe disease and death is most likely in people with chronic medical conditions, during pregnancy and among older people.

Complications of flu include bronchitis, pneumonia, and rarely acute encephalitis

Flu infection can also worsen existing medical conditions such as heart disease.

Flu infection during pregnancy can cause severe illness and increases the risk of miscarriage, congenital abnormalities, premature birth and stillbirth.

## How is flu spread?

Flu is spread by coughing and sneezing.

Flu can also spread by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching your mouth and nose.

Anyone with flu can be infectious from 1–2 days before to 3–5 days after symptoms start. **This means that you can pass on the flu virus to a vulnerable patient even before you know that you are sick.**

**Some people with flu do not have any symptoms but they can still spread infection to others.**

If you have symptoms of flu please stay at home. Do not go to work or visit hospitals, residential care facilities or vulnerable people. Contact your GP.

## Why do I need the flu vaccine if I am healthy?

You are working in a healthcare environment, so your risk of getting flu is much higher - it's 10 times higher than for the general public. This means that your risk of spreading flu to others is also much higher.

Elderly and at risk patients may not get sufficient protection from the flu vaccine themselves so they rely on you to keep them safe.

## 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. The flu vaccine protects against 4 circulating strains of flu virus.

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

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks.

## How safe is the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines are very safe. They have been given for more than 60 years to millions of people worldwide.



## Who should be vaccinated?

Flu vaccine is recommended for all healthcare workers including:

- Medical, nursing and paramedical staff
- Medical, nursing and paramedical students
- Allied health professionals and students
- All GP practice staff
- Dental personnel
- Hospital porters and cleaners
- General support staff
- Ambulance personnel
- Staff in disability and social care services especially those in residential settings
- Healthcare administrative staff
- Carers
- Any other healthcare staff who have contact with patients



## Should pregnant healthcare workers be vaccinated?

**Yes.** Seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for pregnant women. This is because they are at higher risk of severe complications due to flu. Flu in pregnancy can also cause premature birth, miscarriage and stillbirth.

Flu vaccine protects pregnant women during pregnancy and provides ongoing protection to their newborn baby during their first few months of life.

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



## Is there anyone who cannot get the flu vaccine?

Most people can get the flu vaccine.

It is not recommended for those who have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any of its ingredients.

People on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab), should not get the flu vaccine, because of a potentially increased incidence of immune-related adverse reactions.

## What about people with egg allergy?

People with egg allergy can get seasonal flu vaccine. This may be given by your GP, pharmacist or in your workplace or you may need referral to a hospital specialist.

## When should you delay getting the flu vaccine?

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.

## Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

**No.** The vaccine does not contain any live viruses and cannot cause flu.

## What can I expect following vaccination?

The most common side effects are mild and may include soreness, redness or swelling where the injection was given. Headache, fever, aches and tiredness may also occur.

Remember if you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reason - don't assume it's the flu vaccine.

If you have a temperature, stay at home and ring your GP for medical advice.



## Where do I get vaccinated?

Contact your peer vaccinator, line manager or occupational health department.

You can also get the flu vaccine free of charge from your GP or pharmacist.

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 Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (split virion, inactivated) or scan the QR code to read the relevant patient information leaflet.



National Immunisation Office

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

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Protect yourself.  
Protect others.

Plain  
English  
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