

Dear Parent/Guardian

At the start of this new year we wanted to get in touch to highlight the importance vaccinating young children against flu

As you will know flu is a very common infection in babies and children, but it can be very unpleasant for them and can have serious consequences. Children with flu have the same symptoms as adults, including a high temperature, chills, aching muscles, a headache, a stuffy nose, a dry cough and a sore throat. Some children develop complications with flu, such as bronchitis or pneumonia. Children may need hospital treatment, and very occasionally a child may die from flu. Actually, healthy children under the age of 5 are more likely to be admitted to hospital with flu than any other age group. For children with long-term health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, lung disease, or heart disease, getting flu can be very serious as they are more at risk of developing serious complications.

The flu vaccine can be given to young children using a nasal spray. This year the vaccine is available free on the NHS for eligible children, including:

- **children aged 2 and 3 on 31 August 2019 (that is children born between 1st September 2015 and 31st August 2017). This includes children who are 4 years old now, but were 3 on August 31st 2019. These children should receive their vaccine through their general practice.**
- all primary school children.
- children aged 2 to 17 with long-term health conditions

Currently the uptake of flu vaccine among young children has been low, which is very concerning. Dr Jamie Lopez Bernal, Head of Flu, Public Health England said:

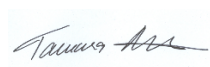
Uptake among 2 to 3-year-olds is behind where we would like to see it, so we are calling on parents to get their children vaccinated as soon as possible. Current evidence suggests the vaccine is a good match for the main strain of flu that is circulating.

If you have a pre-school child who is eligible for the flu vaccine and has not yet received it please contact your GP surgery to arrange for them to be vaccinated.

The nasal spray flu vaccine will not only help protect your child against flu, the infection will also be less able to spread from them to their family. Vaccinating children also protects others that are vulnerable to flu, such as babies, older people, pregnant women and people with serious long-term illnesses. The flu vaccine for children has a good safety record. Millions of children in the UK have been vaccinated safely and successfully. Because the main flu viruses change each year, a new nasal spray vaccine has to be given each year. We have included some further information about the flu vaccine on the next page of this letter.

Thank you for your help with this.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Tamara Djuretic

Director of Public Health and Prevention,
London Borough of Barnet

Flu Vaccine Questions and Answers

How safe is the flu vaccine for children?

The flu vaccine for children has a good safety record. Millions of children in the UK have been vaccinated safely and successfully.

How does the children's flu vaccine work?

The vaccine contains live but weakened flu viruses that do not cause flu in children. It'll help your child build up immunity to flu in a similar way as natural infection, but without the symptoms. Because the main flu viruses change each year, a new nasal spray vaccine has to be given each year, in the same way as the injectable flu vaccine.

Who will give the children's flu vaccination?

In the autumn/winter of 2019-20, the vaccine is available free on the NHS for eligible children, including:

- children aged 2 and 3 on 31 August 2019- that is, children born between 1 September 2015 and 31 August 2017
- all primary school children
- children aged 2 to 17 with long-term health conditions

Children aged 2 and 3 will be given the vaccination at their general practice, usually by the practice nurse.

Children who are 4 years old are also eligible for flu vaccination provided they were 3 on 31 August 2019. These children should also be offered the vaccination at their general practice.

Primary school children will be offered their vaccination in school. Children who are home educated will also be offered the vaccine, provided they're in an eligible age group. If you have a primary school aged child who has missed their vaccine please contact the school nurses on **020 8447 3622**

Are there any children who should delay having the nasal spray flu vaccine?

Children should have their nasal spray flu vaccination delayed if they're unwell with a high temperature. The vaccination can be delayed until they feel better. If a child has a heavily blocked or runny nose, it might stop the vaccine getting into their system. In this case, their flu vaccination can be postponed until their nasal symptoms have cleared up.

Are there any children who should not have the nasal spray flu vaccine?

Children may not be able to have the nasal spray flu vaccine if they have:

- a severely weakened immune system
- a severe egg allergy with anaphylaxis that's led to intensive care hospital admission
- severe asthma – that is, those being treated with steroid tablets or who have needed intensive care because of their asthma
- are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past 72 hours
- an allergy to any of the [vaccine ingredients](#), such as neomycin
- a condition that requires salicylate treatment

If your child is at high risk of flu and cannot have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the injected flu vaccine.

If you're not sure, check with the school immunisation team, the nurse or GP at your surgery, or a specialist.