

Flu (influenza)

What to do, when to get help and who should have the vaccine

Flu can make you feel very unwell

Flu is a viral infection. Symptoms often start quickly. Most people recover at home, but flu can be serious, especially during pregnancy, in older people and in people with some health conditions.

What are the symptoms?

Flu often causes several of these symptoms at the same time:

- **Sudden fever or chills**, although not everyone has a fever.
- **Aching muscles, headache and marked tiredness.**
- **A dry cough, sore throat or poor appetite.**

A cold usually starts more gradually and mainly affects the nose and throat. Symptoms overlap, so you cannot be certain from symptoms alone.

Call 999 now if

Emergency symptoms

- **You have severe difficulty breathing**, such as gasping, choking or being unable to get words out.
- **You have sudden chest pain.**
- **You are coughing up blood.**

Get medical advice today if

- **You are worried about a baby or child.**
- **You are 65 or over, pregnant, or have recently given birth.**
- **You have a long-term health condition or weakened immune system.**
- **You feel very unwell or short of breath**, or your symptoms are not improving after 7 days.

Contact CHG. When CHG is closed, use NHS 111 online or call 111.

What can I do at home?

- 1 Rest and sleep.** Give your body time to recover.
- 2 Drink regularly.** Water is best. Aim for pale urine.
- 3 Treat fever and aches.** Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help if they are suitable for you. Follow the packet instructions.
- 4 Stay at home while you feel unwell.** Avoid close contact with other people while you have a high temperature, feel hot or shivery, or are not well enough for normal activities.

Use medicines safely

- **Do not give aspirin to anyone under 16.**
- **Do not take two medicines containing paracetamol** at the same time. Many cold and flu remedies contain it.
- **Ask a pharmacist** if you are pregnant, take other medicines or are unsure what is safe for you.

Antibiotics and antiviral medicines

Antibiotics do not treat flu because flu is caused by a virus.

Antiviral medicines are not routinely needed for flu. If you are in one of the groups under 'Get medical advice today' on page 1, contact CHG or NHS 111 promptly for an assessment. This does not mean that an antiviral will automatically be prescribed. A clinician will consider whether your illness is likely to be flu, whether flu is circulating, when your symptoms started, your medical history and how unwell you are. If an antiviral is appropriate, it works best when started early, usually within 48 hours.

Reduce the spread

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and warm water.
- **Catch coughs and sneezes** in a tissue or your elbow, then bin used tissues.
- **Clean frequently touched surfaces** and let fresh air into shared rooms where practical.

Why have a flu vaccine every year?

Vaccination reduces your chance of serious illness and hospital admission. Flu strains change and protection falls over time, so the vaccine is updated and offered each year.

The flu vaccine cannot give you flu

You may have a sore arm, headache, aches or a mild temperature for a short time. These are expected immune responses, not flu.

Who can have a free NHS flu vaccine in 2026/27?

The NHS programme starts at different times for different groups:

From 1 September 2026	From 1 October 2026
• Pregnant women • Children aged 2 or 3 on 31 August 2026 • Children from Reception to Year 11 • Children aged 6 months to under 18 in a clinical risk group	• Adults aged 65 or over, including anyone turning 65 by 31 March 2027 • Adults aged 18 to 64 in a clinical risk group • People in long-stay residential care • Carers and close contacts of people with weakened immunity • People aged 16 or over who are homeless

Frontline health and social care workers are usually vaccinated through their employer. Eligible social care workers without an employer scheme can use the NHS programme.

Which health conditions count?

Examples include serious breathing, heart, kidney, liver or neurological conditions; diabetes; a weakened immune system; problems with the spleen; learning disability; and a body mass index of 40 or more. This is not the complete list. Ask CHG or a pharmacist if you are unsure.

Which vaccine will I have?

- **Adults usually have an injection.**
- **Most children are offered a nasal spray.** An injected vaccine is available when the spray is unsuitable, or when parents do not accept it because it contains porcine gelatine.

Egg allergy and other checks

Tell the vaccinator about allergies, previous vaccine reactions and all medicines. Egg allergy does not automatically mean you cannot have a flu vaccine. Low-egg and egg-free vaccines are available, and the vaccinator will choose a suitable product or seek specialist advice if needed.

- **Do not have another dose of the same vaccine** if you had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose or one of its ingredients, unless a specialist advises otherwise.
- **Wait until you feel better** if you have a high temperature on the day of vaccination.

How do I get the vaccine?

Adults aged 18+	Children aged 2 or 3	School-aged children
NHS website or App, GP practice or participating pharmacy. You may also be invited by maternity, care-home or workplace services.	GP practice from September or a participating pharmacy from October.	Usually through school. Follow the school consent and catch-up information.

The start date is not a deadline

If you are eligible, you can still be vaccinated later in the season. Most adults are invited from October so protection is closer to the expected flu peak. Ask CHG or a participating pharmacy if you are unsure when or where to book.

Contact CHG

- **Routine help:** cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/appointments/
- **Reception:** 01285 653122 or 01285 653184.
- **When CHG is closed:** use NHS 111 online or call 111 for urgent medical advice.
- **Alternative formats or feedback:** contact reception if you need this information in another format or language, or want to report something unclear or inaccessible.

Further information

- **Flu symptoms and self-care:** nhs.uk/conditions/flu/
- **Flu vaccination and booking:** nhs.uk/vaccinations/flu-vaccine/
- **Children's flu vaccination:** nhs.uk/vaccinations/child-flu-vaccine/



A routine adult flu vaccination appointment