Flu Vaccinations and You

**Flu Vaccinations and Immunosuppression**

**The Flu Vaccination: why you should have it.**

**It’s FREE because YOU need it**

**Who is this leaflet for?**

This leaflet is for patients with immunosuppression and explains the importance of having an annual flu vaccine to protect yourself from getting the influenza virus, commonly known as ‘flu’.

**Am I at risk?**

Immunosuppression falls into many different categories. If you are immunosuppressed, you have a greater risk of becoming more seriously ill from flu than the general population. If you think you need a flu vaccine you can discuss this with your Consultant, Practice Nurse or GP.

**Some Immunosuppression Conditions**

People with HIV Solid organ transplant recipients

Bone marrow/stem cell transplantation Multiple Myeloma

Immune system genetic disorders Radical radiotherapy

History of haematological malignancy\* Systemic steroid treatment\*

Chemotherapy leading to immunosuppression

Immunosuppressive/immunomodulating biological therapy

Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment\*

\*For more detail, please see page 15 of [Green Book Chapter 19 Influenza (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1107978/Influenza-green-book-chapter19-16September22.pdf)

**What is Flu?**

Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter, which is why it’s sometimes called seasonal flu. It’s a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat. A bad bout of flu can be much worse than a heavy cold. The most common symptoms of flu are fever, chills, headache, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness.

Evidence suggests people who are immunosuppressed are particularly at risk from flu. The risk is much greater than for people who are normally fit and healthy.

Some of these complications can be life threatening. Every year people in England die from complications caused by the flu virus with deaths ranging from less than 1,000 to over 20,000 per year. Many of these deaths could have been prevented by having the flu vaccination.

**Why is this important for you?**

If your immune system is suppressed due the one of the conditions listed above, you are at greater risk of catching flu and experiencing the complications from flu.

For this reason, flu vaccination should also be offered to household contacts of immunocompromised individuals. This includes individuals who expect to share living accommodation on most days over the winter and therefore for whom continuing close contact is unavoidable. This may include carers.

**Preventing flu in the first place is the best option.**

**How can you protect yourself?**

The most effective way to protect yourself from flu is to have a Flu Vaccine each winter.

Flu is unpredictable. Flu vaccination provides the best protection. There are different strains of flu virus. The strains that are most likely to cause illness are identified in advance of the flu season. Vaccines are then made to match them as closely as possible. Even if the vaccine doesn’t perfectly match a strain, it usually provides some protection against it.

The vaccines are given in the autumn ideally before flu starts circulating.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q. Can flu be treated with antibiotics?**

A. No. Flu is a virus and the only way to be really protected is with a flu vaccine.

**Q. Will having the vaccine give me flu?**

A. No. The injectable vaccine contains an inactive form of the virus which cannot cause flu. Some people may have a sore arm and mild aches and pains which means the vaccine is working and should only last 48 hours.

**Q. Is the vaccine safe?**

A. Yes. The vaccine is known to be very safe and can be given to babies and very elderly people with very few problems or reactions.

**Q. I had a vaccination last year. Do I need another one this year?**

A. Yes. The flu viruses can change from one winter to the next. Flu vaccines are updated for each winter to give protection against the strains of flu that are most likely to be going around. For this reason, we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

Also, protection from flu vaccination goes down with time so even if some of the strains are the same you should have a flu vaccine again each flu season.

**Q. I think I have already had flu. Do I still need a vaccination?**

A. Yes; the vaccine will still help protect you. Other viruses can give you flu-like symptoms, or you may have had flu but because there is more than one type of flu virus you should still have the vaccine even if you think you’ve had flu.

**Where can I get a vaccine?**

**Having your vaccination at your GP Practice**

Everybody who is eligible for a FREE Flu Vaccine can get one at their GP Practice.

You may receive an invitation by letter, telephone call, text message or email or the information may be on the GP Practice website, depending on how your GP Practice communicates with their patients.

Many GP Practices will hold large flu vaccination clinics, and you may not need an appointment for these special clinics. It is best to find out dates and times by calling them or checking on the Practice website.

If you do not hear from your GP Practice in early Autumn, it is really important that you call them to arrange an appointment to have a vaccination.

If somebody voluntarily cares for you, they can also have a flu vaccination, so they don’t become ill and have to stop looking after you.

**Having your vaccination in a community pharmacy**

It may be more convenient for you to have your Flu Vaccine at a participating pharmacy. Many pharmacies can offer this service for patients who are eligible for a Flu Vaccine. If you have the vaccination in a pharmacy, they will take your details and let your GP Practice know you have had the vaccination.

**If you need more information:**

* Flu vaccine - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
* [Flu vaccine and cancer treatment | Treatment for cancer | Cancer Research UK](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/cancer-drugs/flu-vaccine)
* [Flu vaccine | Vaccine Knowledge Project (ox.ac.uk)](https://vaccineknowledge.ox.ac.uk/flu-vaccine)

**The Flu Vaccination is FREE and EFFECTIVE book your appointment today**