

# Immunising primary school children against flu

A quick guide for healthcare teams – school nurse teams, immunisation teams, community pharmacies and general practices – working with schools



This guide aims to support healthcare teams working with schools on the extension of the annual flu immunisation programme to children. It complements other materials available such as *Immunising primary school children against flu – information for headteachers and other school staff*, which can be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-immunisation-for-primary-school-children-advice-for-headteachers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-immunisation-for-primary-school-children-advice-for-headteachers)

From October 2015, all children of school years 1 and 2 age in England will be offered flu vaccination in the form of a nasal spray. Schools are not the only places where children can be immunised but they do offer an effective way of delivering immunisation across the population, ensuring good uptake.

## Benefits for schools

To encourage schools to participate in the programme, healthcare professionals can make schools aware of the benefits of the programme which include:

- protecting the child from what can be a very unpleasant illness
- reducing the chance of others in the family, the school (including teaching staff) and those at greatest risk of flu in our wider communities, from getting flu
- reducing sickness rates thereby improving attendance and learning for both staff and children
- providing opportunities to incorporate wider health messages into the curriculum and across the school community.

## What schools need to know:

- flu immunisation will mostly take place between October and December 2015
- participating local healthcare teams will be in contact with schools from May 2015
- where delivery through schools is confirmed, healthcare teams may ask for their help in preparing the session, for example, by distributing consent forms and information to parents
- the vaccine used is Fluenz Tetra<sup>®</sup>, an effective nasal spray with an excellent safety record

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It was very slick and seamless;  
little time wasted waiting  
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## Getting ready

### Whole-school approach

The immunisation delivery process works well where there is time for some whole-school thinking about why the school wants to get involved, what the public health benefits are, and what the wider learning opportunities (and other benefits) are that arise from involvement.

Healthcare teams may want to support schools to develop a clear rationale and communication strategy for taking part in the programme. National communication materials are also available to support this. This will encourage everyone to participate – from pupils, parents, to staff and governors.

### Attendance and learning

Reduced pupil absence means less disruption to learning and can impact positively on pupil progress. Reduced teacher absence that may result from vaccinating children also means less disruption to learning and may also reduce costs of providing supply or other cover during the flu season.

You may want to encourage schools to think about how participation in the programme could form part of their school self-evaluation, demonstrating the benefits and impacts on attendance and learning.

## A healthy community

Healthier families and communities can also benefit schools directly. Periods of illness put families under increasing pressure by making existing health conditions worse, or creating additional strain for those caring for younger or older relatives and may also restrict opportunities to attend work for parents and carers.

Head teachers can explain to staff and pupils how the school is contributing to wider public health benefits through taking part in the immunisation programme. There may also be unrealised benefits for schools in taking part in such public health initiatives, for example, building relationships with local healthcare teams and services may prove useful in developing integrated approaches to promoting other aspects of public health.

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Attendance rose  
so we took part  
again in the  
second year!  
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## The curriculum

Using the curriculum to support pupils in learning about related topics can have additional benefits. Lessons can include the specific issue of viruses and how they spread across populations; the positive benefits and public health imperatives of vaccination; parallel models of immunisation across the developed and developing nations. This can include learning relevant to science, mathematics, literacy, PSHE, history and citizenship.

Resources like e-bug ([www.e-bug.eu](http://www.e-bug.eu)) and using digital badges ([www.makewav.es/health](http://www.makewav.es/health)) can help schools plan relevant learning in a number of curriculum areas. Please ensure that your schools are aware of these excellent free resources.

## Leadership

Since 2013, schools across the country have been piloting the delivery of flu vaccination to children through schools. In the pilot phases, these schools allocated a colleague to plan and administer the school arrangements, and liaise with the healthcare team. As the healthcare team, you are responsible for ensuring that schools understand the importance of their role in the process and that disruption to the school day is minimised.

Encourage schools to think about what kind of team approach would work best in their school. The programme can involve a relatively long lead-in followed by high levels of intensive administrative and on the day activity. These are issues that would need agreeing in advance with the school.

Discuss their involvement with governors – for example, would they want to pay for staff to be vaccinated as an additional benefit? Some schools may choose to provide an injectable vaccine for their teachers through their own occupational health services.

Staff with certain medical conditions that put them more at risk of flu, or who are pregnant, are entitled to free flu vaccination (injectable vaccine) through the NHS. Eligible staff should contact their GP practice.

Staff absence because of flu can be disruptive to learning, and be a drain on school budgets.

## Liaising with the healthcare team

Healthcare teams are responsible for ensuring that they are in regular contact with schools in the build up to the immunisation session so that roles and responsibilities are clear.

Many healthcare teams produce excellent communication materials and packs to support roll out – schools could agree with their healthcare team what materials would be most valuable to use in some of their own communications (eg website, school newsletters) to raise awareness of the immunisation among parents. To assist these communications, public information materials aimed at schools and parents/guardians will be produced in the lead up to the flu season 2015/16. Once available, they can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme)

Healthcare teams should also ensure that schools are able to direct parents/guardians to a relevant healthcare professional if they have any concerns, worries or questions about the immunisation that are not already addressed in information leaflets, as schools should not be expected to handle such queries.

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Happy  
healthy children  
make the best  
progress  
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Healthcare teams could suggest that schools may want to have administrative support in place and provide a named member of staff who will act as the link with the healthcare team throughout. Schools are used to co-ordinating whole-school events, such as school photographs, which involve movement of staff and pupils around the school, and managing visitors on the day. Immunisation day is no different and identification of a link person could save time.

## Parents and carers

As the healthcare team, you should provide information for parents as part of the information pack that goes out with consent forms. You could share the FAQs with schools or provide information on your website for parents to access at their convenience. Use existing communication channels such as assemblies, parents' evenings, websites and text service to reach parents and children with consistent messaging.

## Consent

Although schools distribute the consent forms, the healthcare team collates and reviews the forms and produces the final list of pupils who will be immunised. This should be shared with the school in advance, as some children may not be receiving the immunisation and the school may wish to ensure these children are otherwise occupied during the immunisation session.

There can be last minute changes to who is immunised. Parents may later withdraw consent, or fail to give consent in writing in advance but present a consent form on the day. In all cases, it is the healthcare team that is responsible for handling these issues. Schools may benefit from being aware of these changes.

## Key messages

It may be useful to use national messaging for the programme to develop some key messages tailored to your schools, to support the community in understanding why they are getting involved. Here are some examples of key messages you could offer:

We are taking part in the extension of the annual flu programme to children because we:

- are committed to supporting our children to be healthy and well
- want to do what we can to make sure that our children can come to school to learn and make progress
- value our role in supporting public health initiatives which impact positively on our whole-school community, including parents, carers and families
- welcome the learning opportunities that being involved in a national public health initiative like an immunisation programme can bring to our children
- can see and make the links between our involvement in the immunisation programme and other areas of school life.
- additional information materials for schools on the flu vaccine programme 2015/16, once available, can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme) (consent form, child flu leaflet 'Protecting your child against flu', invitation template letter including Q+A).

