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| *[Provider letter-headed letter with normal details]*  *TEMPLATE LETTER FOR COMMUNITY BASED DELIVERY* |  | |
|  |  |
| [Date] |  | |

Dear Parent/Guardian,

**Flu vaccination for primary school age children by [GP/Pharmacy/Community clinic]**

From October 2015 all children of school Years 1 and 2 age will be offered flu vaccination through a nasal spray. This is an extension of the national flu immunisation programme to children which began in 2013, and is part of a phased introduction based on the advice of independent experts. In addition to this national roll-out to children of Year 1 and 2 age, there are some parts of the country where all primary school-aged children will be offered flu immunisation. These are areas that have participated over the last two years in a pilot programme. In general practice, all 2, 3 and 4 year olds will also be offered flu immunisation across the country.

Your [son/daughter] [child’s name] is therefore invited to attend for a **free flu vaccination** at [venue] on:

[Insert dates – preferably ones that allow for people’s working hours and other demands on their time]

Please phone us now on [phone number] to arrange a convenient time on one of these days.

Alternatively, please phone [phone number] to arrange another date and time for [your child’s name] **free flu vaccination.**

Your child will be offered a flu vaccine that is given as a simple spray up the nose. It is painless, very quick, and serious side effects are uncommon. This vaccination programme is designed to protect your child against flu which can be an unpleasant illness and, although rarely, sometimes causes serious complications. By having the flu vaccination, children are also less likely to pass the virus on to friends and family. This will help to protect those who are at greater risk from flu including infants, older people and those with an underlying health condition. The flu vaccine provides protection against the strains that are predicted to circulate in the coming season. These strains may change from year to year which is why we recommend vaccination every year.

A leaflet explaining the programme is enclosed and at the end of this letter are answers to some commonly asked questions about flu and the vaccination. This information includes details about children for whom the nasal spray is not appropriate**.**

**If your child becomes unwell, wheezy or has their asthma medication increased just before or on the day of the vaccination session, please contact the healthcare team on** **[phone number]**

If you decide that do not want [your child name] to have the vaccination please let us know on [phone number] so we can enter this on his/her medical records. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

## Common questions about the children’s flu vaccination

### Why should children have the flu vaccine?

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can often last several days. Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

### What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness. It may also reduce the chance of others in your family getting it from your child. It can help you avoid having to take time off work or other activities because you are ill or need to look after your sick child.

Over the past two years the programme has been piloted in a number of areas. In those areas less flu has been detected in all age groups of the population. This suggests that as well as protecting the vaccinated children other people benefitted too.

### How will the vaccine be given?

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray.

### Who will give my child their flu vaccination?

Specially trained healthcare staff will give your child the flu vaccination. Sometimes older children may give the vaccine to themselves, under the supervision of the healthcare team.

### How does the nasal spray work?

The nasal spray contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity. When your child comes into contact with the flu virus they will be less likely to get ill.

### Are there any side effects of the vaccine?

Serious side effects are uncommon. Children may commonly develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. This may last a few days. The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there’s no need to worry that it hasn’t worked.

### Are there any children who shouldn’t have the nasal vaccine?

Children should not have the nasal vaccine if they:

* are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past three days (vaccination should be delayed until at least three days after the wheezing has stopped)
* are severely asthmatic, i.e. being treated with oral steroids or high dose inhaled steroids
* have a condition that severely weakens their immune system or have someone in their household who has a weakened immune system and needs isolation
* have severe egg allergy. Most children with egg allergy can be safely immunised with nasal flu vaccine. However, children with a history of severe egg allergy should seek specialist advice. Please check with your GP.
* are allergic to any other components of the vaccine.\*

If your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can’t have the nasal flu vaccine, they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Children who have been vaccinated with the nasal spray should avoid household contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two weeks following vaccination.

\*\* See the website at <http://xpil.medicines.org.uk> and enter Fluenz Tetra in the search box for a list of the ingredients of the vaccine.

**How effective is the vaccine?**

### Because the flu virus can change from year to year there is always a risk that the vaccine does not match the circulating virus. During the last ten years the vaccine has generally been a good match for the circulating strains although last year it was not.

### Has the nasal vaccine been used in other countries?

Yes; it has been used safely in America for many years and it was used in the previous two flu seasons in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.

# My child had the flu vaccination last year. Do they need another one this year?

# Yes; the flu vaccine for each winter helps provide protection against strains of flu that may be different from last year. For this reason we recommend that even if vaccinated last year, your child should be vaccinated again this year.

**Why aren’t all primary school aged children being offered the vaccine in all areas?**

Although the vaccine has been extensively tested and has an excellent safety record, some areas have been piloting the programme for the past two years. These pilots were designed to help us understand how to vaccinate large numbers of children in a short period of time. Most of these areas will continue to offer the vaccine to all primary school-aged children this year.

### Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatine derived from pigs (porcine gelatine)?

Yes. The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the vaccine viruses stable so that the vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

### Can’t my child have the injected vaccine that doesn’t contain gelatine?

The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children. It also reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other family members (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce spread so effectively and so is not being offered to healthy children as part of this programme. However, if your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can’t have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Some faith groups accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to you. For further information about porcine gelatine and the nasal flu vaccine, see [www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response)