Help Greater Manchester keep protected this winter – information for supporting conversations around winter vaccinations

Every winter the NHS offers free vaccines, to those eligible, to help protect against serious illnesses that become more common as the weather gets colder.

We all take little steps every day to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. We make sure everyone has their seatbelt on, tell our children to look both ways before they cross the road, and keep an eye on the baby monitor.

We want the public to see getting vaccinated in the same way. A simple step we can take to protect ourselves and others from serious illness.

We have created this information sheet as a guide to start conversations about winter vaccinations. It can help you to share with people why vaccines are important, what vaccines are available, and to who, and where people can go to get vaccinated.

We hope this information will be useful to those working in communities, in health care settings and other places where people are supporting conversations about the importance of vaccination.



## Why is getting vaccinated important?

Vaccines are the safest and most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Viruses common in winter can make some people very unwell and result in serious complications that may need hospital care.

Getting vaccinated also makes it less likely you will pass a virus on to someone else, so it can help to protect those around you too.

Viruses change and protection decreases over time, so it is important to top up your protection. It’s important to have some vaccinations, like the one for flu, every year.

## Which winter vaccines are available and who is eligible?

### People who are pregnant

When you are pregnant your immune system (your body’s natural defence) is weakened. This means that you are less able to fight off infections.

Getting the recommended vaccines while you’re pregnant will help you and your baby stay protected against serious illness.

If you’re pregnant this winter you are eligible for:

* Flu

Available from 1st September 2025

Get the vaccine at your midwife appointment

* RSV

Available all year round

It is recommended to have the vaccination from 28 weeks pregnant

Get the vaccine at your midwife appointment

* Whooping cough

Available all year round

You usually have the vaccine at 20 weeks pregnant, but you can have it from 16 weeks. To give your baby the best protection you should have the vaccine before 32 weeks.

Get the vaccine at your midwife appointment

### People with long-term health conditions

Winter viruses can be very dangerous, even life threatening for some people, especially those with a long-term health condition.

Those with a long-term health condition aged 6 months and above are eligible for:

* Flu

Available from 1st October 2025

Make an appointment with your GP practice or local pharmacy

### People with a weakened immune system

You may be eligible for a COVID-19 and a flu vaccine if you have a weakened immune system because of a health condition or treatment.

Those with a weakened immune system aged 6 months and above are eligible for:

* COVID-19

Available from 1st October 2025

Make an appointment with your GP practice or local pharmacy or go to a walk-in vaccination site.

- Flu

Available from 1st October 2025

Make an appointment with your GP practice or local pharmacy

### Children aged 2–3 years-old

Vaccinating your child will help them to stay happy, healthy, and well this winter. Children aged 2–3 years-old are eligible for:

* Flu  
  Available from 1st September

You will be contacted by your child’s GP practice to book an appointment.

### School-aged children (Reception to Year 11)

Flu can be extremely serious, even for healthy children, and can lead to other problems such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

School-aged children are eligible for:

* Flu  
  Available from September

At school (look out for the consent form)

### Adults 65 plus

Older adults are more at risk of becoming seriously unwell from the flu. It can lead to serious health issues like pneumonia, bronchitis and make long-term health conditions worse.

Adults 65 plus are eligible for:

* Flu

Available from 1st October

You can get vaccinated at your GP practice or local pharmacy

### Adults 75 plus (including those who will be 75 by January 2026)

COVID-19 can be dangerous for people aged over 75. It can lead to serious health issues such as pneumonia, heart problems and blood clots, as well as make long-term health conditions worse.   
  
Adults aged 75 plus (including those who will be 75 by January 2026) are eligible for:

* COVID-19

Available from 1st October

You can get vaccinated at your GP practice, local pharmacy, walk-in vaccination site or care home (if you live in a care home for older adults)

* Flu

Available from 1st October

You can get vaccinated at your GP practice, local pharmacy or care home (if you live in a care home for older adults)

Adults aged 75–79 (and who turned 80 after 1st September 2024) are also eligible for:

* RSV

Available all year round

You can get vaccinated at your GP practice.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

General vaccination FAQs

### Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines are safe.

All vaccines are thoroughly tested to meet high safety standards.

It often takes many years for a vaccine to make it through the trials and tests it needs to pass for approval.

### Do I need to be vaccinated this year if I have been vaccinated before?

Yes. Viruses change and protection fades over time, so it is important to top up your protection each year. You might need to have some vaccinations like COVID-19 more than once a year to make sure you are protected.

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### Can you get side effects from a vaccine?

You may experience mild side effects after your vaccination. This is because vaccines work by triggering a response in a person’s immune system.

Most side effects are very mild and only last a short time.

### Can you have an allergic reaction to the vaccinations?

More serious side effects such as a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) are very rare and usually happen within minutes.

The person who vaccinates you will be trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately in the unlikely event that you have an allergic reaction.

### Why are vaccines important if you can still get the illnesses after you’ve been vaccinated?

Vaccines help to build up your immunity to the virus, so your body will fight it off more easily. While the vaccine may not stop you from getting the virus, your symptoms are likely to be milder and you are less likely to get seriously ill if you have been vaccinated.

### How long does it take to get vaccinated?

Getting vaccinated is quick and easy. It only takes a few minutes.

### Will vaccines effect medication?

Vaccines do not interfere with most prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Talk to your GP if you have specific questions about your medical care.

### What can I do if myself or my child misses a vaccine?

It's important that vaccines are given on time for the best protection, but if you or your child missed a vaccine, contact your GP practice to catch up. It's never too late to get vaccinated.

### Why am I eligible for the flu vaccine this year but not the COVID-19 vaccine?

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) updated its advice for the autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme. This autumn the COVID-19 vaccine will be offered to those who are the highest risk of serious illness. Those eligible are:

* adults aged 75 years and over
* residents in a care home for older adults
* people aged 6 months and over who have a weakened immune system

# Flu vaccination FAQs

### Why do I have to wait until October for my flu vaccine?

This year most eligible adults will be offered a flu vaccine from 1st October.

This is because the latest scientific evidence shows that protection from the flu vaccine decreases over time in adults. It is better to have the vaccine closer to when flu typically circulates.

### Can the vaccine cause flu?

No, the vaccine cannot cause flu because the viruses in it have been weakened to prevent this from happening.

### How long does it take the flu vaccine to work?

The flu vaccine usually takes up to 14 days to work.

### Can I have the flu vaccine if I am unwell?

If you have a high temperature, wait until you're feeling better before having your flu vaccine.

If your child has a high temperature, wait until they're feeling better before having the flu vaccine. If they have a very blocked or runny nose, they may have to wait to get the nasal spray vaccine until they're feeling better, or they may be offered an injected flu vaccine instead.

### Can I have the flu vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?

You can have the flu vaccine at the same time as other vaccines such as the COVID-19 and shingles vaccines.

It's not usually given at the same time as the RSV vaccine, but you can have them at the same time if a doctor or nurse thinks it's needed.

### Can flu harm children?

Flu can be very unpleasant for children and can sometimes cause serious problems, such as pneumonia.

Each winter in the UK, thousands of children who do not have a health condition need hospital care because of flu.

### Does the vaccine protect children against flu?

As well as helping to give children protection against flu, the vaccine also helps stop them passing it to others like grandparents, who will be more vulnerable. Because so many infections can be passed on in school, high vaccination uptake among children can also help prevent the spread of infection in the wider community.

### Does the children’s flu spray contain gelatine?

Children aged 2–3-years-old and school-aged children are given the flu vaccine as a quick and painless nasal spray.

The nasal spray vaccine contains a small amount of gelatine from pigs (porcine gelatine).

If you would prefer your child to have a vaccination which does not contain gelatine, then an injection is also available. Make sure you tick this box on their consent form or let your GP know. The flu injection may also be more suitable for children with allergies and other medical conditions.

### 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. This means your child will be better able to fight off flu. 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.

### Does the nasal spray hurt?

No, the nasal spray is quick and painless.

### What should I do if my child misses their flu vaccine at school?

If your child misses their vaccination at school, you can call IntraHealth on 0333 3583 397 or email [contactimms@intrahealth.co.uk](mailto:contactimms@intrahealth.co.uk) to arrange an appointment.

### My child is home-schooled – how will they get their flu vaccine?

Children who are home-schooled should be offered a flu vaccine at a community clinic. Children who are 4 years old but have not started school can get the flu vaccine at their GP practice.

### What long-term health conditions make someone eligible for the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is recommended for people with certain long-term health conditions, including:

* conditions that affect your breathing, such as asthma (needing a steroid inhaler or tablets), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or cystic fibrosis
* heart conditions, such as coronary heart disease or heart failure
* chronic kidney disease
* liver disease, such as cirrhosis or hepatitis
* some conditions that affect your brain or nerves, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy
* diabetes or Addison's disease
* a weakened immune system due to a condition such as HIV or AIDS, or due to a treatment such as chemotherapy or steroid medicine
* problems with your spleen, such as sickle cell disease, or if you've had your spleen removed
* a learning disability
* being very overweight – a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above

Speak to your GP practice or your specialist if you have a health condition and you're not sure if you're eligible for the flu vaccine.

# COVID-19 vaccination FAQs

### Why are we still having COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines are offered because viruses change, and protection fades over time. It's important to top up your protection if you're at increased risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

### Can I choose which COVID-19 vaccine I have?

You will be offered the right vaccine for you.

All COVID-19 vaccines used by the NHS safe and effective.

### Can I have the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?

You can have the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine. If you’re eligible for an RSV vaccine, it’s more effective to have it on a different day to your COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

### Can I have the COVID-19 vaccine if I am unwell?

If you have, or think you have, COVID-19, wait until you're feeling better before having the vaccine. You should also wait if you have a high temperature or feel very unwell with any illness.

If you’ve recently recovered from COVID-19, there is no need to wait to get the vaccine.

### What health conditions or treatments make someone eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

You may be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine if you have a weakened immune system because of a health condition or treatment.

This can include if you:

* have or had blood cancer, such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma
* have had an organ transplant, bone marrow transplant or stem cell transplant
* have HIV
* have a genetic disorder that affects your immune system, such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID)
* are having or recently had chemotherapy, biological therapy or radiotherapy
* are taking steroid medicine (depending on the dose)
* are having long-term immunosuppressive treatment for a condition such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), scleroderma or psoriasis

This list is a summary and does not include everything. Speak to your local pharmacy, GP practice or specialist if you're not sure if you're eligible for the COVID- 19 vaccine.

# RSV Vaccination FAQs

### If the RSV vaccine is available all year round, why should I get it now?

Unlike some vaccinations – like for flu or COVID-19 – the RSV vaccine is available year-round.

You can catch RSV at any time of year however, we usually see more cases during the colder months, so it’s important that those eligible take up the vaccine to keep protected this winter.

Although the virus is more common during winter, people are advised to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.

**Can I have the RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?**

If you’re pregnant, you can have the RSV vaccine at the same time as other pregnancy vaccines like whooping cough and flu but its best to have them as soon as you can rather than waiting to have them at the same time.

If you’re aged 75 to 79 the RSV vaccine is not usually given at the same appointment as the flu or COVID-19 vaccine, but you can have them at the same time if the doctor or nurse thinks it is needed. You can have it at the same time as other vaccines, such as shingles and pneumococcal vaccines.

### How many times do I need to have the RSV vaccination?

If you're pregnant, you should have the vaccine during every pregnancy. This will help make sure each baby is protected for the first 6 months after they're born, when they're most likely to get seriously ill if they get RSV.

Older adults only need 1 dose, which should protect them for several years.

# Vaccinations in Pregnancy FAQs

### Will vaccines harm my baby?

During pregnancy, some vaccines are offered to protect against diseases and their complications. These vaccines are developed to help protect against serious illness to you whilst pregnant, your unborn or newborn baby.

Receiving these vaccines is safe and the best way to protect both mother and baby during this important time. The vaccines do not contain a live strain of the virus, therefore are perfectly safe to have during pregnancy.

### Does the vaccine protect the baby as well?

Vaccines offer the best protection to you and your baby. Vaccines are passed through the placenta to the baby protecting them in the first few months of life and can stop them from becoming seriously ill.

### When should I start getting my pregnancy vaccines?

You'll be offered different vaccines at different stages of your pregnancy.

Flu vaccinations usually begin in September for protection during the winter months (this vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy), the whooping cough vaccine should be given from 16 weeks and the RSV vaccine from 28 weeks.

These vaccines protect you and your baby from serious diseases, and it's best to have them as soon as they are offered.

### Can I my vaccinations at the same time while pregnant?

You can have the recommended pregnancy vaccinations at the same time, but it's best to have them as soon as they're offered rather than waiting to have them all at once.

### What should I do if I have concerns about getting vaccinated when pregnant?

When you are pregnant it is harder for your body to fight infections. Some vaccines are vital during pregnancy to protect the health of you and your baby and keep you both safe. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your maternity team or GP practice.