

# BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY THIS WINTER



**WITH YOUR FLU VACCINE  
+ COVID-19 BOOSTER**

Flu and COVID-19 can be life-threatening,  
so protect yourself, your family and patients.

**Don't delay, get your free vaccines now.**

**This autumn and winter it's essential you protect yourself and others against both flu and COVID-19. Health experts have warned we could have a bad flu season, alongside rising cases of COVID-19. So, it is more important than ever that you get a free flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster to get the best protection.**

**The flu vaccine and the COVID-19 booster are the best way for you to protect yourself from both viruses, so you can continue to be there for your family and friends, and patients.**

**Here are some answers to questions you may have about getting the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster.**

### **Why should healthcare workers receive the flu vaccine?**

On average more than 11,000 people die each year from flu. This winter, health experts have warned we could see high levels of flu circulating alongside COVID-19. We could also be less immune to flu viruses as there were fewer cases last winter due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Being healthy doesn't reduce your risk of getting flu or passing it on. You can have flu without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends, colleagues, and patients, many of whom may be at increased risk from flu.

### **How effective is the flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine will help prevent you from getting the flu and is your best protection against the virus. If you do get flu after vaccination, it's likely your symptoms will be milder and shorter-lived than they would otherwise have been.

### **What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?**

You may get a slight temperature, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you have the injection. Other reactions are rare.

### **I had the flu vaccine last year. Do I need to have it again?**

Yes. The viruses which cause flu can change every year, which means the flu (and the flu vaccine) this year may be different from last year.

### **I'm pregnant or breastfeeding – should I get the flu vaccine?**

Pregnancy alters how the body handles infections such as flu. So, you should have the flu vaccine if you're pregnant to help protect you and your baby. It's safe to have the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy, from conception onwards. It's also safe for women who are breastfeeding to have the vaccine.

### **Who should not have the flu vaccine?**

Most adults can have the flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine injection if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs. Ask your GP practice, pharmacy, or your employer, for information on getting a low-egg or egg-free vaccine.

If you're ill with a high temperature, it's best to wait until you're better before having the flu vaccine.

### **How long does the flu vaccine take to become effective?**

It takes the immune response about two weeks to fully develop after vaccination.

### **Can the flu vaccine cause flu?**

There are several types of injected flu vaccine. None of them contain live viruses so they cannot give you flu.

## **Why is it particularly important to get the flu vaccine this year?**

Flu and COVID-19 can both be life-threatening and spread more easily in winter when we are more likely to be indoors or in crowded spaces. That's why it's important that eligible people come forward for their flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster. If you catch flu and COVID-19 at the same time, research shows you're more likely to be seriously ill.

## **How do I get my flu vaccine?**

Frontline healthcare workers may be offered the flu vaccines at their place of work or from another local service. Your employer will provide more information on how to get your flu vaccine.

## **Why should healthcare workers receive the COVID-19 booster?**

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccines have saved more than 100,000 lives and significantly reduced hospitalisations from COVID-19. To maintain this high level of protection through the coming winter, frontline healthcare workers will be offered a booster vaccine to protect themselves and those in their care who are most at risk.

With both flu and COVID-19 expected to be circulating this winter, it's important to boost your immunity and help protect yourself and others.

## **Will my COVID-19 booster be from the same manufacturer as the original COVID-19 vaccine I had?**

You will be given a booster dose of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. AstraZeneca may be an option if this is the vaccine that you had for the first two doses.

These vaccines have already been given to millions of people in the UK. You will be offered the right vaccine for you which may be the same or different from the vaccines that you had before.

## **Why do I need a COVID-19 booster, when I have had two COVID-19 vaccines already?**

The Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) has advised booster vaccinations as a precaution, to ensure that the protection built up against COVID-19 does not decline through the winter months.

## **What are the common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

As with your previous dose the common side effects are the same for all COVID-19 vaccines used in the UK, and include:

- having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around 1 to 2 days after the vaccine
- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches, or mild flu-like symptoms

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better. Although feeling feverish is not uncommon for 2 to 3 days, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate you have COVID-19 or another infection.

## **Are there any serious side effects to having the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Worldwide, there have also been recent, very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger men within several days after vaccination. Most of these people recovered and felt better following rest and simple treatments.

You should seek medical advice urgently if, after vaccination, you experience:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart

## **Is there anyone who shouldn't have a COVID-19 booster?**

There are very few people who should not have a booster.

If you have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine you should discuss this with your doctor.

## **How and when will I receive my COVID-19 booster?**

You will be offered your booster vaccine no earlier than six months after your second COVID-19 vaccination. Your employer will let you know how to get your COVID-19 booster.

## **I'm pregnant or breastfeeding – can I get the COVID-19 booster vaccine?**

Pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers who are in a high-risk group for COVID-19 can get the vaccine. If you have any questions you can discuss having the booster with your GP practice or maternity team.

## **Has the COVID-19 booster been given to people like me?**

The booster vaccines have been given to tens of thousands of adults, including people with underlying health conditions.

The UK government commissioned a booster clinical trial called COV-BOOST which looked at the safety and immune response of a COVID-19 booster. In this study approximately 40% of participants were health and social care workers, and they included people from different ethnic backgrounds and age groups.

## **I've had COVID-19 already. Do I need to get the booster?**

Getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had COVID-19 as it is for those who haven't.

As with all new viruses, we don't yet know how long those who have recovered from COVID-19 are immune for, or the level of their immunity. Being vaccinated will help protect you from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 in the future, so you can continue to be there for your family, friends and patients.

## **Will I get the COVID-19 booster at the same time as my flu vaccine?**

You may be offered both at the same time, or separately. If you are offered either vaccine, get them as soon as possible. Do not wait to try and schedule both vaccinations at the same time as this may not be possible and could delay your protection for the winter ahead.

## **Is it safe to have the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster at the same time?**

The JCVI has advised that it is safe for the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster vaccine to be given at the same time.

However, many people may be offered their flu and COVID-19 vaccines at different times. Don't delay, you should get your vaccinations as soon as possible rather than waiting for the possibility of getting them together.

For more information visit  
**[www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations](https://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations)**