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23 November 2021

Influenza Vaccination Campaign 2021/2022

Dear Principals

Information about the **2021/2022 children's influenza vaccination campaign.**

All children aged 2-17 can get the free flu vaccine

The nasal flu vaccine is now available in Ireland for children aged 2-17. Participating GP practices and Pharmacies will be giving the vaccine. It is given as a spray up the nose, there is no need for an injection. It is a safe, easy and pain free way to help protect children against flu this winter.

The flu vaccine will also help reduce the spread of flu to others such as siblings, parents, teachers at high risk of flu complications (e.g. pregnant or chronic health conditions) and grandparents.

The flu vaccine and administration are free for everyone aged 2 to 17 years through the HSE vaccination programme.

Flu can be serious in children

Children are twice as likely to get the flu than adults. While most children who get the flu will have mild symptoms, some children can get complications such as pneumonia or bronchitis and may need to go to hospital. Children, especially younger children, are also more likely than adults to get severe complications of flu.

Flu can cause serious illness in children, and children with chronic health conditions are most at risk of severe complications of flu.

Symptoms of flu in children include

- High temperature
- Muscle pains
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness (fatigue)

Children also carry the flu virus in their system longer than adults do. They can spread the flu virus easily to other children, like those in day-care centres and schools, and to older and vulnerable people around them. The flu vaccine will give children the best protection against flu.

Wider benefits of the flu vaccine for children

Children who are sick with flu can sometimes miss weeks in school.

If enough children are vaccinated against flu, fewer children and adults will need to see their doctor or need treatment in hospital because of flu.

Getting the nasal flu vaccine and other vaccines

For children aged 12-17 they can get the flu vaccine at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine if they have not yet had it.



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It is also safe for children to get the nasal flu vaccine at the same time or before and after any of the vaccines that may be offered to them through the HSE's schools immunisation programme. The 4 in 1 and MMR vaccine are offered in Junior Infants and the HPV, Tdap and MenACWY vaccine are offered to first years.

Supporting the flu campaign this year

Due to public health restrictions, there was a dramatic reduction in circulating flu during last season. However, this may have resulted in a reduction in population immunity and increased susceptibility to flu this season. Furthermore, there is evidence of increased circulation of other respiratory viruses such as Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) this year. With the relaxation of restrictions, a rebounding in flu and COVID-19 cases may occur which could impact our schools.

Therefore, it is vitally important this year more than ever that children and those in at risk populations are vaccinated early and protected against flu. The flu vaccine is the best protection we have against flu.

We would appreciate it if you could take suitable opportunities to promote the flu vaccine with parents and promote flu facts (attached at the end of this leaflet).

You may also find the following resources helpful:

- HSE flu website: <https://www.hse.ie/flu>. It also contains further information about the three flu vaccines available this year (including the injectable flu vaccines for adults) and all those who are recommended the flu vaccine.
- Information leaflet for parents (in English and translations available on the flu website): <https://bit.ly/LAIVLeaflet>
- Poster on the Children's Flu vaccine (in English and Irish translation available on the flu website): <https://bit.ly/LAIVPosterE>

As always, we thank you for your continued support for the flu vaccination programme.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lucy Jessop', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Lucy Jessop
Director of Public Health
National Immunisation Office
MRCN 424447



Flu Vaccine for Children aged 2-17



Spread the flu facts, not the influenza virus

Fact



In Ireland between 2009-2019, almost 5000 children were admitted to hospital with complications of flu. Almost 200 children had to have treatment in intensive care and 40 children died. Source: (HPSC)

Fact



Anyone can get the flu. Children carry the flu virus in their system longer than adults do, and they can spread the flu virus easily to other children and to the older and vulnerable people around them.

Fact



The nasal flu vaccine protects against the same strains as the vaccine given to at risk groups and 65s+. Children aged 2 to 17 years need to get the flu vaccine every season.

Fact



The nasal flu vaccine has been found to be more effective for children than the flu injection.

Fact



The nasal flu vaccine is the recommended vaccine for children who are in at-risk groups and have conditions like chronic heart, liver or respiratory diseases.

Fact



The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu and you cannot spread the flu to others after getting the nasal flu vaccine.

Fact



A small number of children between the age of 2 to 8 years who are at risk and have never had the flu vaccine before will need 2 doses of the nasal flu vaccine 4 weeks apart for protection.

Fact



The nasal flu vaccine is very safe. Some children may have a runny or blocked nose, aches and may have an increased temperature after getting the vaccine but it is usually mild and goes away on its own. Reactions are generally rare.

Fact



The flu vaccine for children has been given to children in the US since 2003, in the UK since 2013 and in Ireland since 2020.

Fact



A study from the UK showed a 94% reduction in primary school age children and a 59% reduction in adults GP influenza like illness consultations after the flu vaccine was introduced for children. Source: (G Kassianos, et al)