

If you get flu?

Flu is a virus, so antibiotics won't help. Take painkillers like paracetamol or aspirin to relieve headache and muscle pains, and to reduce your temperature.

Remember: read all labels, and do not take more than the recommended dose of any medicine, e.g. paracetamol is in a number of different flu remedies, as well as standard paracetamol tablets. Speak to your pharmacist if you intend to take more than one form of medication to relieve your flu. Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years of age unless instructed to do so by a doctor.

If you live alone, tell a friend or neighbour you are ill, so they can check on you, and help with essential shopping.

The best way to help yourself is to:

- Stay home, keep warm and rest – this will help you recover more quickly in the long run
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic liquids to replace the fluid lost in sweating
- Eat what you can
- Try to avoid mixing with other people until you have recovered
- Remember that other people may be more vulnerable to flu infection than you are

Should I contact my doctor?

There is usually no need to contact your doctor. Your pharmacist will provide advice and recommend appropriate treatment.

If, however, you are frail or elderly, or have one of the conditions listed earlier in this booklet, you are at greater risk from flu, and should consult your doctor if concerned.

All flu sufferers should consult their doctor if:

- Your temperature doesn't settle after four or five days
- Your symptoms get worse
- You start to cough up dirty spit
- You think you are seriously ill
- You develop chest pain, or become short of breath

You could discuss your symptoms with your GP by phone, rather than making an appointment.

What about helping others?

If you know there is flu around, look out for signs that a neighbour may be ill:

- They may not be going about their normal activities
- Mail, milk or newspapers may not have been taken into the house for a day or two
- Curtains, normally opened, may be left closed during the daytime

Offer to make drinks or do the shopping if they live alone, or you think they may struggle to cope.

The vaccination – a few myths exploded

Flu vaccination side effects are very rare. You may feel a small soreness in the area where the vaccine is injected. Other side effects some people experience include a slight temperature and muscle aches a couple of days after administration of the vaccine.

The vast majority of people, however, experience no side effects at all.

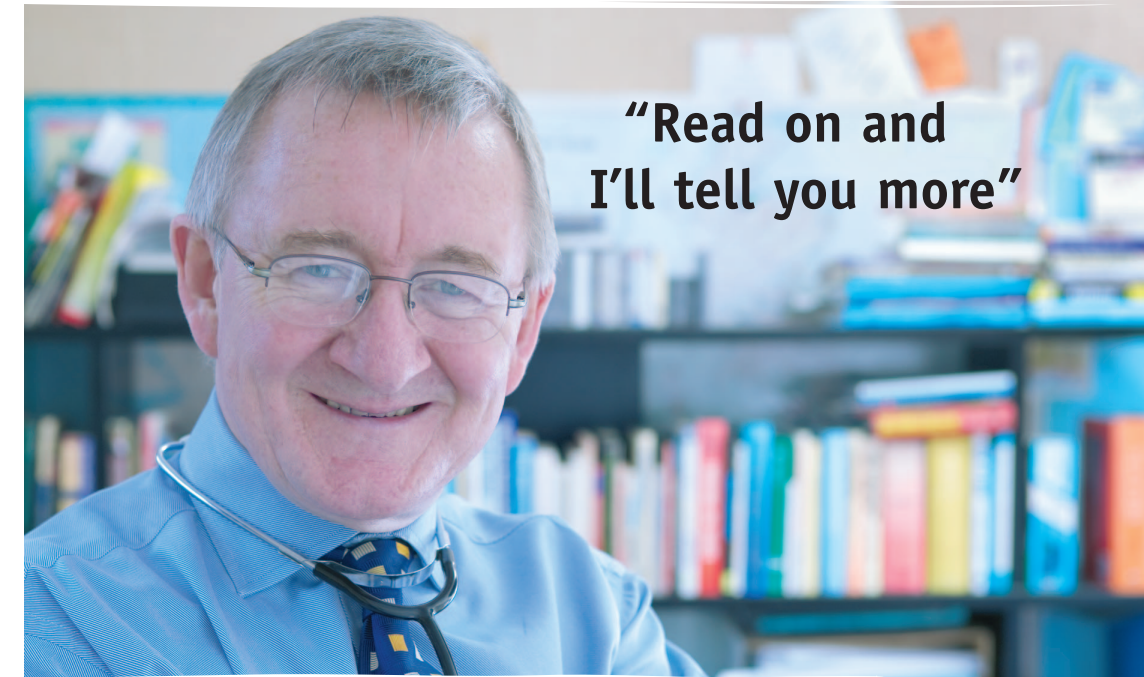
Some people believe that the flu vaccine itself can cause flu. This is not true. As the vaccine contains no live virus, it **cannot** cause flu.

Further copies of this leaflet can be obtained from:

The Scottish Executive Health Department by e-mailing Chris.Sinclair2@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or faxing 0131-244-2157.

You can also visit our website at www.infoscotland.com/flu
For information about health issues and local health services, call the NHS helpline free on 0800 22 44 88 between 8am and 10pm seven days a week.

Over 65 or in an at risk group?
Get your **FREE** flu jab



“Read on and
I'll tell you more”

www.infoscotland.com/flu



Dr Chris Steele

“Well, it’s that time of the year again when you should be thinking about making an appointment to see your GP for your annual flu jab. This leaflet explains a few of the reasons why it’s so important and whether you’re eligible for it or not.”

If you are 65 years or over, or you suffer from a chronic medical condition - particularly serious heart or respiratory disease, diabetes that requires medication, severe kidney or liver disease, or if you have lowered immunity due to disease or treatment, then you may be vulnerable to flu at this time of year.

Doctors recommend the vaccine for two main groups of people: those who suffer from a long term medical condition and those who are aged 65 or over. If you fall into either of the two groups detailed in this brochure, it’s important that you get your flu vaccination. Anyone in these groups is entitled to a free flu jab.

Even if you do not belong to either group, this booklet contains important information on the flu virus, and tips on how to help others, and yourself, should you get flu.

What is Flu?

Flu is an illness caused by influenza viruses. It is most common during the winter months. People often describe colds as flu, but the symptoms of flu come on very suddenly and are different from and much more severe than colds.

Flu symptoms are:

- a high fever
- a shivery feeling
- a headache
- aching body
- extreme tiredness

A dry cough, sore throat and stuffy nose are also common with flu. Flu usually lasts about a week, but you could feel in low spirits for several weeks longer.

How is flu spread?

Flu is highly infectious. It spreads rapidly by coughs, sneezes and touching people who are already carrying the virus.

Who needs the flu vaccination? People aged 65 or over.

If you are 65 or over, you should contact your GP practice to arrange for a flu vaccination. The vaccination will help protect you from flu over the winter months, and can stop other, more serious conditions as a result.

People of all ages with long-term illnesses.

It is important to protect yourself from flu if you suffer from any of the long-term illnesses detailed below:

- Serious breathing problems, e.g. severe asthma needing regular inhaled or oral steroids
- Serious heart conditions
- Severe kidney or liver disease
- Diabetes requiring medication
- Lowered immunity due to disease or treatment e.g. chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer or long-term steroid use
- Problems with the spleen, either because the spleen has been removed (asplenia) or doesn’t work properly, e.g. sickle cell disease
- Any other serious medical condition – If you are not sure about your health or need further advice, please speak to your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist

If you live in a residential care home, talk to your nurse or the manager.

If you are the main carer for an older or disabled person then you should ensure that they are vaccinated (if recommended) and also seek advice from your GP as to whether you should be vaccinated so that you can continue to look after them.

The vaccination will help protect you against flu over the winter months. It can also prevent you getting more serious illnesses.

Why shouldn’t everyone have a flu vaccination?

If you are under 65 and in good general health, flu is not a serious risk to you, and you do not require a flu vaccination.

Is there anyone who should not be vaccinated?

Flu vaccines are prepared in hens’ eggs so they should not be given to anyone with a known anaphylactic (serious) hypersensitivity to egg products. If in doubt, ask your doctor.

How do I get an appointment for a vaccination if I need one?

Appointments are usually arranged between late September and early December. Some patients may have been contacted already by their GP practice regarding the arrangements it has in place.

In other cases, practices may not yet have notified patients directly. To allow these practices adequate time to do this, please wait until the end of October before contacting your practice to find out about the local arrangements for flu vaccination.

What is the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccine is made from part of the outer coat of three different strains of flu virus. The viruses are grown in hens’ eggs, then killed and purified before being made into vaccine.

Flu vaccine is pretty effective. Most people who have been vaccinated will not get flu, but if you do get flu, it is likely to be milder than if you had not been vaccinated.