

Patient information

Protecting your baby against 'flu'

❖ Children's 'flu' vaccine

This leaflet explains why it is important to think about getting your other child/children to have the 'flu' vaccine prior to taking your new-born baby home.

The children's 'flu' vaccine is offered as a single dose nasal spray, (in most children), to children 2 years old and above. It helps to protect them against 'flu' (NHS vaccination programme). It is given as a single nasal spray squirted up each nostril; it is quick, painless. The vaccine can be offered free on the NHS for eligible children.

❖ Why offer children the 'flu' vaccine?

'Flu' can be a very unpleasant illness for children with potentially serious complications, including bronchitis, pneumonia and middle ear infection. The symptoms are the same as for adults – including fever, chills, aching muscles, headache, stuffy nose, dry cough and a sore throat lasting up to a week. They may need hospital treatment. In fact, healthy children under the age of five are more likely to have to be admitted to hospital with 'flu' than any, other age group.

❖ What are the side effects?

The nasal spray has very few side effects – the main one being, getting a runny nose after the vaccination for a few days.

Children should **not** have their 'flu' vaccination if they have a runny or blocked nose or have become wheezy prior to receiving the vaccine. This is because if the child has a runny/blocked nose it might stop the vaccine getting into their system and therefore should be postponed until their nasal symptoms have cleared up.

The vaccine is **not** recommended for children who have:

- A severely weakened immune system
- Severe egg allergy
- Severe asthma (being treated with steroid tablets or inhalers)
- An allergy to any of the vaccine ingredients such as neomycin

❖ **How do I get the 'flu' vaccine for my child/children?**

You may request this from your child's GP practice. If you have children at school you may have already been contacted. This is usually done early November each year.

Children aged two, three and four years old, will be given the 'flu' vaccination at the GP practice, usually by the practice nurse.

Children in school years one, two and three are likely to have their 'flu' vaccination at their school. This will be arranged by the school nursing team allocated to the school.

❖ **How does it work?**

The vaccine contains live but weakened 'flu' viruses that does not cause 'flu' in children. It will help your child build up immunity to 'flu' in a similar way as a natural infection. Because the 'flu' viruses change with each new year, a new nasal spray has to be given each year, the same as the adult 'flu' vaccine programme.

❖ **Stopping the spread of 'flu'**

This vaccine will not only help protect your child but it will be less able to be spread from them to the rest of the family. Children spread 'flu' because some children do not use tissues or wash their hands. This vaccination will also protect 'others' who are vulnerable to 'flu', such as your premature baby.

If you want more information please do ask to speak to your baby's doctor whilst on the Neonatal Unit. You may also wish to talk to you GP, practice nurse or your child's school nurse.