

Flu (influenza) 'at risk' groups¹

The Department of Health¹ current recommendations for the administration of the influenza vaccine include the following 'at risk' categories:

- everyone aged 65 or over
- all those aged six months or over in a 'clinical risk' group
- pregnant women
- living in long-stay residential care homes or other long-stay care facilities
- those in receipt of a carer's allowance, or who are a main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- health and social care staff directly involved in patient care
- from September 2013, flu nasal spray vaccine will be available annually for all children of 2 and 3 years old.² The flu immunisation programme will be extended over a number of years to include all children aged two to 16 inclusive.^{2,3}

The 'clinical risk' groups are:

Chronic respiratory disease

Asthma that requires continuous or repeated use of inhaled or systemic steroids or with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) including chronic bronchitis and emphysema; bronchiectasis, cystic fibrosis, interstitial lung fibrosis, pneumoconiosis and bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD). Children who have previously been admitted to hospital for lower respiratory tract disease.

Chronic heart disease

Congenital heart disease, hypertension with cardiac complications, chronic heart failure, individuals requiring regular medication and/or follow-up for ischaemic heart disease.

Chronic kidney disease

Chronic kidney disease at stage 3, 4 or 5, chronic kidney failure, nephrotic syndrome, kidney transplantation.

Chronic liver disease

Cirrhosis, biliary arthesia, chronic hepatitis.

Chronic neurological disease

Stroke, transient ischaemic attack (TIA). Conditions in which respiratory function may be compromised due to neurological disease (e.g. polio syndrome sufferers).

Healthcare professionals will consider on an individual basis the clinical needs of patients including individuals with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and related or similar conditions; or hereditary and degenerative disease of the nervous system or muscles; or severe neurological or severe learning disability.

Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes requiring insulin or oral hypoglycaemic drugs, diet-controlled diabetes.

Immunosuppression

Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment. Patients undergoing chemotherapy leading to immunosuppression. Asplenia or splenic dysfunction, HIV infection at all stages. Individuals treated with or likely to be treated with systemic steroids for more than a month at a dose equivalent to prednisolone at 20mg or more per day (any age) or for children under 20kg a dose of 1mg or more per kg per day.

It is difficult to define at what level of immunosuppression a patient could be considered to be at a greater risk of the serious consequences of influenza and should be offered flu vaccination. This decision is made on an individual basis and left to the patient's clinician. Some immunocompromised patients may have a suboptimal immunological response to the vaccine.

Pregnant women

Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy (first, second or third trimesters).

If you are generally fit and healthy, under 65 years old, and don't fall into any of the 'at risk' categories, you should not need a vaccine. However, it is advisable to talk to your GP or practice nurse if you feel you do fall within an 'at risk' category.

Anyone eligible for a flu vaccination should receive it annually, as it offers the best protection. If you have any health concerns please consult your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for further information.

Reference:

1. Department of Health, Immunisation against infectious disease. Green Book Chapter 19 August 2012. https://www.wp.dh.gov.uk/immunisation/files/2012/07/Green-Book-Chapter-19-v4_71.pdf Accessed 27 February 2013.

2. Public Health, England. Routine childhood immunisations from June 2013. http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210828/8515_DoH_Complete_Imm_schedule_A4_2013_06_accessible.pdf Accessed 9th July.

3. DH Flu immunisation programme 2013 to 2014 letter <http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-immunisation-programme-2013-to-2014> Accessed 10th July.

PREV0041 Date of preparation July 2013