

A healthcare worker in purple scrubs is smiling warmly at a patient. The worker has a name tag that says "Mona". The patient is seen from the back of the head and shoulder, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The background is a dark blue wall.

CARE

**GET VACCINATED.
GET WINTER STRONG.**

Help keep yourself and the people you care for safe this autumn and winter.

Get your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

For more information visit www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations

For some, flu and COVID-19 are unpleasant illnesses. But for many, they can be very dangerous and even life-threatening.

Every winter, thousands die from flu and people can still get very ill or die from COVID-19. Catching both viruses at the same time increases the risk of serious illness even further.

As a frontline care professional, you're more likely to be exposed to the viruses. These can also be passed on to those you care for who are at greater risk of serious illness, such as older adult care home residents or those with certain health conditions.

Vaccinations are our best protection against flu and COVID-19. Over the last few years, they have kept tens of thousands of people out of hospital and helped to save countless lives. It is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or COVID-19 before, as immunity fades over time and these viruses change each year.

Getting both vaccines ahead of winter, when the viruses spread more easily, are two of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others around you safe, so you can continue to be there for the people you care for. This year, it is important to get your vaccines as soon as you can due to the risk of the new COVID-19 variant.

Here are some answers to questions you may have about getting the vaccines.

Why should social care professionals receive the flu vaccine?

Flu is an unpredictable virus that can be life-threatening during a flu season. Last year we saw a rebound in flu levels, with increased flu hospitalisations. Both the flu and COVID-19 viruses will be in circulation at the same time this winter and catching both increases the risk of serious illness.

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 those you care for, many of whom may be at increased risk from serious illness from flu.

Getting your vaccine is quick and easy. While some people may experience some side effects, these will usually be mild and short-lived. The vaccines will keep you protected and if you do get flu, your symptoms will be milder, you can expect to recover faster and there is less risk you will be hospitalised.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine has a good safety and effectiveness record. It can provide protection to those that are most likely to become seriously ill from flu and help reduce the spread of flu in the population.

Up to 90 days from vaccination, flu vaccines cut the risk of flu hospitalisation by around a quarter in older adults, and one third in younger adults. If you do get flu after vaccination, it's likely to be milder and not last as long.

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. Most side effects are mild and only last for a day or so.

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

If you are eligible for the flu vaccine based on the JCVI recommendations, it is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu before, as immunity fades over time and flu viruses change each year. The vaccines give you additional protection to that gained from previous infections.

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

You should have the flu vaccine if you're pregnant to help protect you and your baby. Getting flu whilst pregnant increases the chances of you and your baby needing intensive care and could cause your baby to be born prematurely or have a low birthweight.

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 ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you are allergic to eggs or have a condition that weakens your immune system, you may not be able to have certain types of flu vaccine – check with your vaccinator.

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

Can the flu vaccine cause flu?

There are several types of injected flu vaccine. None of them contains live viruses so they cannot give you flu. Some people may experience some mild and short-lived side effects.

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. If you get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, research shows you're more likely to be seriously ill. That's why it's important that eligible people come forward for their seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccines.

How do I get my flu vaccine?

The seasonal flu vaccine should be offered through your employer. Social care professionals who are in direct contact with people who receive care should also have the vaccine provided through their employer. Some frontline social care professionals who do not have access to employer-led occupational health schemes can access the flu vaccine through the NHS free of charge.

Why should social care professionals receive the seasonal COVID-19 vaccine?

To maintain a high level of protection through the coming winter, frontline social care professionals will be offered a seasonal vaccine to protect themselves and those in their care who are most at risk. With both flu and COVID-19 circulating this winter, it's important to top up your immunity and help protect yourself and others.

Why do I need a seasonal COVID-19 vaccine, when I have had a COVID-19 vaccine last winter?

It is important to top up your protection, even if you have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or COVID-19 before, as immunity fades over time and the virus can change each year.

If you have had recent COVID-19 you will still get extra protection from the vaccine. This year, it is important to get your vaccines as soon as you can due to the risk of the new COVID-19 variant.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe and effective?

COVID-19 vaccination has a good safety and effectiveness record and gives you the best protection against the virus. Tens of millions of people around the world have had a COVID-19 vaccine. The safety of the vaccines has been extensively reviewed in both adults and children by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The vaccines continue to be monitored and reports of serious side effects are very rare.

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:

- feeling tired
- a headache, general aches or mild flu-like symptoms
- feeling or being sick

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better.

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

Side effects are reported to the MHRA through their Yellow Card scheme. Serious side effects are very rare and are greatly outweighed by the risks of severe illness from getting COVID-19.

Details on side effects can be discussed with your health professional and found in your patient information leaflet.

Worldwide, there have been very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after some vaccinations.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger men within several days after vaccination. Most 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 seasonal COVID-19 vaccine?

There are only a very small number of eligible people who should not have a seasonal dose for clinical reasons. 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 seasonal COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccination may be offered through your employer or you can book by downloading the NHS App, online or by calling 119. There may also be walk-in vaccinations available in your area.

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

Yes, when seasonal vaccinations are available, having the vaccine will help protect you against severe illness. Vaccination against COVID-19 is safe at any stage during pregnancy. If you have any questions, you can discuss having the vaccine with your GP practice or maternity team. COVID-19 vaccination is also safe when breastfeeding.

Has the COVID-19 vaccine been given to people like me?

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

Each of the vaccines is tested on tens of thousands of people across the world. They are tested on people of all age groups, including people with underlying health conditions and people from different ethnic backgrounds. The vaccine has now been given to millions of people worldwide, helping to reduce mortality, hospitalisations and slow the spread of the virus globally.

I've had COVID-19 already. Do I need to get the seasonal vaccine?

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

The COVID-19 vaccine provides additional protection, beyond that of natural immunity from previous infection alone, against serious complications of infection. You should also have some protection from the mild symptoms.

Will I get the seasonal COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as my flu vaccine?

Where possible, we encourage you to get both vaccines in the same appointment to save you time and ensure you are protected against both viruses. If this is not possible, we encourage you to get each vaccine as soon as you can, rather than waiting to get both at the same time.

Is it safe to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time?

For most people, it is fine to have the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time. You may be offered them at the same time or separately. This year, we would encourage you to get both vaccinations as soon as you can and not delay, due to the risk of the new COVID-19 variant.

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