



National Institute for Public Health  
and the Environment  
*Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport*

# Flu jab 2017



Your doctor or general practitioner (GP) will send you an invitation for a flu jab. This folder gives you information about the flu jab.

## What is flu?

- When you have flu you often have a high fever, cold chills, a sore throat, a headache and aching muscles all over your body.
- Flu can lead to pneumonia or heart problems.
- Do you have a condition such as lung disease or diabetes? Flu often aggravates such disorders.
- Flu is not the same as a very bad cold. Flu can make you feel seriously ill.

Flu is caused by the flu virus. You can catch the flu virus if someone with flu coughs, sneezes or talks. Or if you shake hands with someone with flu.

Every winter an average of 1 in 10 people get the flu.

### Important information:

- The flu jab lowers your risk of getting flu.
- Having flu means you are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill.
- You can get the free flu jab from your GP.
- The best time to have the flu jab is between mid-October and mid-November.
- The flu jab protects you for approximately six months.
- However, if you do catch the flu, a flu jab will ensure that the illness is less serious.
- For effective protection, you should get a flu jab every year.
- The flu jab contains different substances every year. This is because different flu viruses are active every year.

## Why have you been sent an invitation to get a flu jab?

Flu can make some people seriously ill. They are the target group for the flu jab. You are also in the target group.



*The flu jab lowers the risk of getting flu.*

## Who can have the free flu jab?

The free flu jab is for people in the target group. You are in the target group if one of the following applies to you:

- You are aged 60 or older;
- You have chronic illness of the heart or blood vessels;
- You have chronic lung disease;
- You have diabetes mellitus;
- You have a kidney disease;
- You have poor immunity (due to illness, medical treatment such as chemotherapy, or are taking medicines that lower your immunity).

Your GP knows if you are in the target group and will send you an invitation.

## Why have the flu jab from the age of 60?

As you grow older your immune system becomes less active. This means that flu can make you become ill more quickly and more severely. And you could develop pneumonia, for example. The flu jab will ensure that you will be less seriously ill with the flu.

## Are you pregnant?

Are you pregnant and in the target group? Then you can have the flu jab. The flu jab is safe for you and for your unborn child.

## When is the best time to get the flu jab?

The best time to have the flu jab is every year between mid-October and mid-November. You will get an invitation to have the flu jab from your GP. Don't wait until there is an outbreak of flu. This is because it takes two weeks for the flu jab to take effect.

If you have a fever, it is better to postpone the flu jab. Wait until your fever has gone.



*It is important to get a  
flu jab every year.*

## Your own decision

It is up to you to decide if you have the flu jab.

## What are the benefits of the flu jab?

- The flu jab lowers your risk of getting flu.
- Having the flu jab means you will be less seriously ill if you do develop the flu:
  - The flu symptoms are often be less serious.
  - There is less risk of pneumonia and other health problems.
  - It is less likely an illness such as a lung disease or diabetes will worsen if you have flu.
  - The risk that you will die from flu or from the consequences of flu is lower.

## Does the flu jab have disadvantages?

- After having the jab, your arm may feel sensitive for a day. The injection site on your arm may become painful, red or swollen.
- You may feel mildly unwell for a few days after having the jab. This is not flu. You cannot get flu from the flu jab itself.
- Are you allergic to egg whites, neomycin or gentamycin? If so, you could have an allergic reaction to the flu jab.

Severe side effects from the flu jab are very rare.

*Have you had a side effect from the flu jab? Tell your doctor or report it on [www.lareb.nl](http://www.lareb.nl). This is the website of the Netherlands Pharmacovigilance Centre.*

## How does the flu jab work?

The flu jab improves your immunity against the flu virus. The substances in the flu jab cause your body to make antibodies against the flu virus.

Two weeks after having the flu jab you will have enough antibodies. What happens if you become infected by the flu virus after the first two weeks?

The antibodies will make the flu virus harmless.

The antibodies ensure that you will not become ill, or will be less ill, from the virus.

The flu jab only protects you against the flu virus. It does not protect you against other viruses, such as the virus that causes the common cold.

You will find more information about how the flu jab works on [www.rivm.nl/grieprik](http://www.rivm.nl/grieprik) and [www.thuisarts.nl/griep](http://www.thuisarts.nl/griep)

## Why have a flu jab every year?

The flu jab gives protection for approximately six months. Last year's flu jab is therefore no longer effective. Furthermore, the flu virus is constantly changing. This means you can get the flu every year. Therefore you need to have a new flu jab every year. In this way your body is able to make new antibodies every year.

Experts predict which flu viruses are the most likely to occur in the coming winter. The flu jab will contain substances that match these viruses. The annual flu jab will protect you against the flu viruses that will most commonly occur this winter.

## Are you going to get the flu jab?

If you are going to have the flu jab, please note:

- Wear clothes that will allow you to easily reveal your upper arm. You will get the flu jab in your upper arm.
- Are you allergic to anything, for example egg whites, neomycin or gentamycin? Please consult your doctor.
- If you want to know what the flu jab contains, see [www.rivm.nl/grieprik/information leaflet](http://www.rivm.nl/grieprik/information%20leaflet)

## Do you want more information?

See [www.rivm.nl/grieprik](http://www.rivm.nl/grieprik) and [www.thuisarts.nl/griep](http://www.thuisarts.nl/griep).

Or contact your general practice or the doctor at your care facility.



The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has appointed the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) to be responsible for the national direction of the Dutch National Influenza Prevention Programme. The Dutch College of General Practitioners (NHG) is the professional body of GPs.

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