

Flu Jab 2019

In October, November and December, nearly 6 million people receive an invitation for the annual flu jab from their family doctor or general practitioner (GP).

The flu jab is for people aged 60 years and older, and for adults and children who have certain medical conditions.

The flu jab is not required. Everyone can decide for themselves whether or not to have the flu jab when it is offered.

Flu is worse than a cold

When you have flu, you suddenly develop a high fever, along with a headache, aching muscles and cold chills. It can take 1 to 3 weeks for you to recover. Flu is caused by the influenza (flu) virus. It is an infectious respiratory disease, which means it affects your airways and is catching. The common cold and the actual flu are often mixed up when people are describing the kind of illness they have.

Flu is highly contagious

The flu virus is spread by talking, coughing or sneezing. It spreads easily in enclosed spaces where people are close together, especially if the space is not well ventilated – like a train or bus, school or childcare centre. Viruses can also be transmitted by touch, via hands and objects like doorknobs. For example, if someone grasps a doorknob and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes, they could be infected.

1 in 10 people get the flu

The World Health Organisation estimates that 5 to 10% of adults get the flu every year, and 20 to 30% of children. Figures from the Netherlands show similar infection rates. The percentage can differ from year to year, which is why it is shown as an average over several years.

2700 people die from the consequences of flu every year

Although the averages can differ significantly from season to season, researchers estimate that somewhere between 1400 and 2700 people die every year as a result of the flu, on average. This conclusion is based on research from 1999-2009. Recent studies show that these figures are even higher.

Possible consequences of flu

Pneumonia or heart problems

Most people who get the flu only develop a respiratory infection. They are usually completely recovered from the infection within 1 to 3 weeks. Some people become severely ill from the flu and can develop complications. The most common complication is pneumonia. Other serious complications include a heart attack or heart failure.

An existing illness may grow worse

If you already have a chronic illness, the symptoms of your illness may temporarily grow worse if you get the flu. This is relevant for people who have diabetes, lung disorders,

heart conditions or kidney disorders. For example, people who have asthma could have more frequent or more severe asthma attacks while they have the flu.

Possibility of permanent health effects

If you have a severe case of the flu, or if you develop complications, your health may not be as good as it was before, even after you recover from the flu. In addition, a pre-existing chronic illness may become permanently worse as a result of the flu.

The flu jab gives protection

The flu jab is the best protection against flu.

By getting the flu jab, you also help protect others.

40% less chance of flu

You are 40% less likely to catch the flu if you get the flu jab. This is an average risk reduction. The risk differs from season to season, depending on developments in each virus during the season. Other factors that influence the effectiveness of the flu jab include people's age, how strong their immune system is, and whether or not they were vaccinated.

Caught the flu? Often less seriously ill

If you catch the flu even after having the flu jab, you will generally be less seriously ill. Research among large groups of people shows that the flu jab lowers the risk of serious illness even if you do get the flu. This effect is difficult to pinpoint at an individual level; more research is still being done.

The flu jab helps you stay as healthy and active as possible.

If you get the flu jab, you are more likely to stay healthy – and if you do get the flu, you are more likely to recover faster and more fully.

A new flu vaccine every year

Different flu viruses

The flu virus is constantly changing. As a result, there are many different varieties of flu virus, and they are different every winter.

Fresh flu jab every year

To respond to the changing viruses, the flu jab is slightly different every year. Experts predict which viruses they expect to see in the upcoming winter season. This year's flu jab offers protection from the predicted viruses. Sometimes the flu virus is different than expected, or a different virus is more common. In that case, the flu jab is slightly less effective, but still offers protection.