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Dear Parent/Guardian,

**Your child's annual flu vaccination will be due this Autumn Term 2017/18**

You are receiving this letter as your son/daughter will be due his/her annual flu vaccination (nasal spray) at school this autumn. This vaccination is recommended to help protect your child against flu. Flu can be an unpleasant illness and sometimes causes serious complications. Vaccinating your child will also help protect more vulnerable friends and family by preventing the spread of flu.

Children from Reception years up to year 4 (born between 01/09/08 and 31/08/13) will be offered their flu vaccination in school and will **not** be available from your GP over the age of 3 years, unless your child has a known significant medical condition.

Flu vaccination is the best protection we have against the spread of this unpredictable virus, and young children are "super spreaders". Flu infects many people and each year causes severe illness and death particularly among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying health condition, even one that is well managed. Since the introduction of the childhood flu programme, the incidence of infection with seasonal flu amongst all these groups has decreased significantly, and it has also been shown to reduce pupil and teacher absenteeism in schools.

A link to the leaflet explaining the programme is attached and at the end of this letter are answers to some commonly asked questions about flu and the vaccination. This information includes details about children for whom the nasal spray is not appropriate. We have also attached a link to the national cartoon video. <http://www.nhs.uk/video/pages/flu-heroes-nasal-flu-spray-for-kids.aspx>

The vaccination is free and is a quick and simple spray up the nose. Even if your child had it last year, it is recommended to have the flu vaccine again this year. Consent forms and additional information will be issued via schools in the autumn

term and further information is available at: [www.nhs.uk/child-flu](http://www.nhs.uk/child-flu) and read through the frequently asked questions overleaf.

Yours sincerely



Charlotte Church  
Immunisation Service Lead

## **Frequently asked Questions about childhood flu**

### **Why should my child have the flu vaccine?**

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children causing fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can last several days or more. Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, acute bronchitis, and pneumonia.

### **How effective is the vaccine?**

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against this unpredictable virus. Flu infects many people and each year causes severe illness and death particularly among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying health condition, even one that is well managed.

The effectiveness of the vaccine will vary from year to year, depending on the match between the strain of flu in circulation and that contained in the vaccine. In the UK the vaccine offered to children has provided good protection against flu since its introduction.

### **It is less than 12 months since my child had their last flu vaccine. Should they have it again?**

Yes. Even if it is less than a year since the last vaccination, it is important to ensure your child is protected by having another one this year.

### **Can the vaccine cause flu?**

No, the vaccine cannot cause flu because the viruses in it have been weakened to prevent this from happening.

### **Does the nasal vaccine contain gelatin derived from pigs (porcine gelatin)?**

Yes. The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (porcine gelatine), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The gelatine helps to keep the vaccine viruses stable so that the vaccine provides the best protection against flu.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/460069/8584-Vaccines-porcine-gelatine-2015-2P-A4-04-web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460069/8584-Vaccines-porcine-gelatine-2015-2P-A4-04-web.pdf)

### **Can't my child have the injected vaccine that doesn't contain gelatin?**

The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children. It also reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other family members (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce spread so effectively and so is not being offered to healthy children as part of this programme. However, if your child is at high risk from flu due to one or more medical conditions or treatments and can't have the nasal flu vaccine they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

Some faith groups accept the use of porcine gelatine in medical products – the decision is, of course, up to you. For further information about porcine gelatine and the nasal flu vaccine, see [www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response)

**So how does the nasal spray work?**

The nasal spray contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity. When your child comes into contact with flu viruses they will then be less likely to get ill.

**Are there any side-effects of the vaccine?**

Serious side-effects are uncommon. Children may develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite. This may last a few days. However, the side effects are much less serious than developing flu or complications associated with flu.

The vaccine is absorbed quickly in the nose so, even if your child sneezes immediately after having had the spray, there's no need to worry that it hasn't worked.

**When will the vaccine be given?**

For school-aged children a vaccination session will be held at school during the autumn term. Your child's school will provide details from the local healthcare team.

If your child is at school and has a health condition that puts them at increased risk from flu, you can ask your child's GP surgery to provide the vaccine if you don't want to wait until the school vaccination session or if this is what you prefer.