

## **SEASONAL FLU VACCINATIONS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Why should I have a flu vaccination?**

Influenza (flu) is a highly infectious air-borne virus that usually strikes between December and May annually. It is transferred from person to person by respiratory droplets in the air that are produced by coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread by hand to mouth or hand to eye contact.

Because it is a viral infection, flu cannot be treated with antibiotics and, although antiviral agents may reduce the severity and duration of symptoms, the only available preventative measure is the seasonal flu vaccination.

The NHS provides flu vaccination free of charge to high-risk groups – including the elderly and those with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes etc, and latterly (since 2010) to pregnant women. Whilst the effects of flu may be less severe than in the aforementioned groups, members of the healthy work-age population are no less likely to contract the virus – indeed may be more exposed to it as a result of overcrowding on public transport, open-plan working etc – and this increases the risk of onward spread to vulnerable members of their own families and communities.

Flu vaccination is only available in the UK to the healthy, work-age population if their employer provides it as a staff benefit or if they pay for the treatment privately.

### **What are the symptoms of flu?**

Flu often starts with a high fever, chills, and aching muscles and joints, and commonly causes respiratory symptoms such as coughing/sneezing and a sore throat. Symptoms are severe and can last for a week to ten days, and may be followed by a further two to three weeks of debilitating fatigue.

Although most people recover from the initial symptoms after about a week to ten days, it can sometimes lead to serious medical complications including pneumonia, nerve and brain damage.

### **What is in the vaccine?**

The vaccine provided by Flu Xpress Ltd is the new Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (inactivated/split) that contains and protects against four influenza virus strains – two influenza A strains and two influenza B strains. This vaccine is the most appropriate vaccine for the healthy work-age (18-65s) vaccination population, and is now solely recommended by Public Health England for use within the NHS for the at-risk 18-65s age group vaccination population.

### **How effective is the flu vaccination?**

The vaccine offers 70-80% immunity against the virus, and the small minority who develop flu despite having been vaccinated are likely to experience milder symptoms and a shorter duration of infection.

### **Does the vaccine contain the Swine Flu Strain (A/H1N1v)?**

Yes. The vaccination provides protection against both seasonal and swine flu virus strains.

### **Does the flu vaccination cause flu?**

No. The vaccine contains an inactivated virus that cannot, in itself, cause flu. Any mild flu-like symptoms that may be experienced for up to 48 hours after vaccination are the normal response of the body's immune system to vaccination – and the majority of people do not notice any such symptoms.

### **Are there any side effects from having the vaccination?**

The flu vaccine has been robustly tried and tested and is extremely safe for administration in the UK population.

Some people may experience a slightly sore arm after the vaccination which can include redness, swelling, pain or bruising around where the vaccine is injected, but the majority of people do not report this side effect.

Less commonly, a mild temperature and aching symptoms may occur as a result of the immune system responding to the vaccine. This can last for up to 48 hours after vaccination and is not considered abnormal.

Side effects more serious than these are extremely uncommon and very rarely occur.

### **How long does it take for the vaccine to take effect?**

Protection against the flu virus starts to develop about one week after receiving the vaccination.

### **How long does the protection last for?**

Protection can last for up to one year.

### **If I had a vaccination last year, will I need another one?**

Yes. This is because different strains of flu circulate every year, and the vaccine is manufactured to provide immunity against the most common flu virus strains in circulation in a particular year.

### **Can everyone receive the flu vaccine?**

The majority of people can safely receive the flu vaccination.

However, if you have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous flu vaccination or an allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine (including neomycin) you will not be offered the jab.

Additionally, the vaccines are prepared in hens' eggs and should not be given to individuals with a known allergy to chicken or egg products.

You will not be vaccinated if you are ill with a fever on the day of vaccination.

You will not be vaccinated if you are pregnant or trying for a baby.

Whilst there is no evidence that flu vaccination is harmful in pregnancy, Flu Xpress Ltd is a solely Occupational Health provider and therefore does **NOT** offer the flu vaccination to pregnant women. Pregnant women wishing to have the flu vaccination should contact their GP surgery where free NHS flu vaccination is available according to current guidance from the UK Department of Public Health.