

# Press release: Children's vaccine 87% effective against circulating flu strain

Public Health England (PHE) has published mid-season data on the effectiveness of this year's flu vaccines, alongside data from other countries, in [Eurosurveillance](#). The data suggest that the nasal spray flu vaccine is 87% effective in children aged 2 to 17 years against the main circulating strain, influenza A(H1N1)pdm09.

The vaccine given to adults aged 18 to 64 in at-risk groups is estimated to be 39% effective against the same strain. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 has been the main strain circulating this season. As the number of cases is lower, a precise estimate for those aged 65 and over will not be available until the end of the season.

More children have been vaccinated than ever so far this season, with over five million children being offered the nasal spray. The vaccine has been offered to an additional school group (year 5), meaning that all children aged 2 to 9 years old are now eligible. As younger children have poorer hand and respiratory hygiene than adults, they tend to spread flu more easily, so protecting them is really important for protecting the rest of the population.

Vaccine uptake in children aged 2 and 3 is 43% and 45.2% respectively, and among school-aged children, this ranges from 56.2% to 63.9% depending on year group. Whilst these are the highest levels ever, there is still more that can be done to increase uptake.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at Public Health England, said:

It is encouraging to see that this year's vaccines are offering a high level of protection against the main circulating strain of flu – particularly for children. Children tend to be 'super-spreaders' of flu, and so protecting them is crucial for protecting the rest of the population.

We're pleased that more parents have been taking up the offer of vaccination for their children – and encourage anyone who is eligible to do so every winter. It's the best defence we have against this unpredictable virus.

Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, said:

The most basic instinct for any parent is to do whatever they can to protect their child. Vaccinations save countless lives and are

absolutely vital.

More children have been vaccinated this year to protect against flu, and it is a positive sign that the vaccine itself appears to be more effective than in previous years.

Our world-leading vaccination programme saves lives, and I urge all parents of young children to make sure their child is vaccinated against flu and other childhood diseases.

This season, people aged 18 to 64 in an at-risk group were offered the 'quadrivalent' vaccine in injected form (protecting against four strains of flu). A new 'adjuvanted' vaccine was also available for anyone aged 65 and over. The current data does not include estimations of effectiveness for this age category, as further data and analysis is required to calculate an accurate figure.

Data on the effectiveness of this season's vaccines against influenza B strains are unavailable, as these strains have not circulated widely this season.

## Background

People who are eligible for the flu vaccine this year included:

- adults aged 65 and over
- adults aged 18-64, with a long-term health condition
- children aged 2-3 via their GP practice
- school children in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- pregnant women
- health and social care workers
- carers
- morbidly obese people

Adults with chronic conditions need the flu vaccine because people with respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or asthma are seven times more likely to die if they catch flu, and people with cardiovascular problems like chronic heart disease or angina, or have had a stroke, are 11 times more likely to die.

The risk is far worse for those with chronic liver disease, who are [48 times more likely to die if they get flu](#).

We cannot predict with certainty which strains will circulate in the UK during winter. The World Health Organisation (WHO) makes recommendations for the composition of the northern hemisphere flu vaccine every year, and this is published six months in advance to allow for vaccine production times.

The adjuvanted trivalent influenza (aTIV) vaccine which PHE and the NHS recommended this year for people aged 65 and over, was licenced for use in this age group in September 2017. It has previously been used in other countries.