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| *[School letter-headed letter with normal details]* |  |
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| [Date] |  |

Dear Parent/Guardian,

## Flu vaccination for children in years 7 and 8 in pilot areas around the country

This year, for the first time, children in years 7 and 8 in some areas are being offered a flu vaccination at their school. This follows on from a series of pilot vaccination programmes that were successfully carried out last year in primary schools in several regions around the country.

Your child will be offered a flu vaccine that is given as a simple spray up the nose. It is painless and very quick, and serious side effects are uncommon. This vaccination programme is designed to protect your child against flu which can be an unpleasant illness and, although rarely, can sometimes cause serious complications. Also, by having the flu vaccination, children are less likely to pass the virus on to friends and family, some of whom may be at greater risk from flu if they are, say, an infant, an older person or someone with an underlying health condition.

A leaflet explaining the programme is enclosed and on the back of this letter are answers to some commonly asked questions about flu and the vaccination, including details about the small number of children for whom the nasal spray is not appropriate. **If your child is wheezy or has had their asthma medication increased after you have returned the consent form (see below), please contact the healthcare team on** **[phone number] before the day of the vaccination session.**

Please complete the enclosed consent form (one for each child, please) and return it to the school by [insert date] or within [insert number of days or weeks] of receipt of this letter], so your child can be given the vaccine. Please note if the consent form is returned after this date your child may not be able to have the vaccine.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Please remember to return the consent form even if you DO NOT consent to the vaccination for your child, including explaining the reason for your decision.
This will help us in the development of the flu vaccination programme in the future.

# Common questions about the children’s flu vaccination

## Why should children 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 often last several days. Some children can also get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Complications of flu can include a painful ear infection, bronchitis, and pneumonia – these may be severe.

## What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Having the vaccine will help protect your child from what can be a very nasty illness and will also reduce the chance of others in your family getting it. It can help you avoid having to take time out because you are ill or to look after your sick child.

## How will the vaccine be given?

For most children, it is given as a nasal spray.

## Who will give my child their flu vaccination?

Specially trained healthcare staff will give your child the flu vaccination. In some cases, older children may be given the option to give the vaccine to themselves, under the supervision of the healthcare team.

## How does the nasal vaccine work?

The nasal vaccine contains viruses that have been weakened to prevent them from causing flu but will help your child to build up immunity, so that when your child comes into contact with the flu virus they are unlikely to get ill.

## Are there any side effects of the vaccine?

Serious side effects are uncommon but many children develop a runny or blocked nose, headache, general tiredness and some loss of appetite that lasts for a short period. 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.

## Are there any children who shouldn’t have the nasal vaccine?

Children should not have the nasal vaccine if they:

* are currently wheezy or have been wheezy in the past week (vaccination should be delayed until at least seven days after the wheezing has stopped)
* are severely asthmatic, i.e. being treated with oral steroids or high dose inhaled steroids
* are allergic to eggs or any part of the vaccine[[1]](#footnote-1) or
* have a condition that severely weakens their immune system.

Also, children who have been vaccinated should avoid close contact with people with very severely weakened immune systems for around two weeks following vaccination. This is because there’s an extremely remote chance that the vaccine virus may be passed to them.

## I believe the nasal vaccine contains products derived from pigs (porcine gelatine), which means my child can’t have it because of our beliefs.

The nasal vaccine contains a highly processed form of gelatine (derived from pigs), which is used in a range of many essential medicines. The nasal vaccine provides the best protection against flu, particularly in young children.

This nasal vaccine not only helps protect your child against disease but, if enough children are vaccinated, the disease won’t spread from one person to another, and so their friends and family are also protected.

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)

## Can’t my child have the injected vaccine that doesn’t contain gelatine?

The nasal vaccine offers the best protection for your child and it reduces the risk to, for example, a baby brother or sister who is too young to be vaccinated, as well as other members of the family (for example, grandparents) who may be more vulnerable to the complications of flu. The injected vaccine is not thought to reduce the spread as 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 because of this, they should have the flu vaccine by injection.

## What is the pilot programme?

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which is the independent expert advisory body for the national immunisation programme, has recommended extending the flu immunisation programme to healthy children. This will lower the potentially serious impact of flu on each child and will also help reduce spread to other members of the community, including the child’s immediate family. The pilot programme in schools is designed to help understand how best to vaccinate large numbers of children in a short period of time. We will use this information to help us plan the expansion of the flu programme to more children. The pilots are not designed to test the vaccine, which has been extensively tested and has an excellent safety record.

## Has the vaccine been used in other countries?

Yes; it has been used safely in America for many years and it was used in the 2013/14 flu season in the UK where hundreds of thousands of children were successfully vaccinated.

1. See the website at <http://xpil.medicines.org.uk/> and enter Fluenz or Fluenz tetra in the search box for a list of the ingredients of Fluenz vaccine [↑](#footnote-ref-1)