Flu immunisation in primary schools in Scotland

Primary schools in Scotland have successfully supported the flu immunisation programme over the past six years. School staff continue to have a pivotal role in delivering this school-based national programme.

This education pack has been designed to support the delivery of flu immunisation in your school. It includes a checklist to prepare for flu immunisation.

Trust the facts

- Flu is much worse than a bad cold – it can be life threatening. Children are particularly at risk.
- Thousands are hospitalised with flu every year in Scotland.
- You can’t get flu from the vaccine.
- The flu vaccine is the best way to protect children against flu and reduces the chance of them spreading the virus to others.

The vaccine

Almost all children are eligible to receive the nasal spray*, which is more effective than the injection, and is quick and painless. The vaccine is safe and doesn’t cause flu. Children will just feel a little tickle in their nose.

Some children will need to receive the flu vaccine as an injection in their upper arm. For example, children who have severe asthma or have medical conditions that make their immune system weak should not receive the nasal spray vaccine.

* The nasal spray vaccine contains a small amount of pork gelatine. Many faith groups, including Muslim and Jewish communities, have approved the use of gelatine-containing vaccines. However, it’s the parent’s or carer’s choice whether or not they want their child to have the nasal spray vaccine. Those who choose not to have the nasal spray vaccine for religious reasons may request the injectable alternative when completing the consent form.

The education pack and all materials contained within it are available for download at www.healthscotland.scot/flueducationpack
Can the flu vaccine give children flu?

No, the flu vaccine can’t give children flu. The virus in the vaccine has been weakened so that it doesn’t cause flu. It helps children build up immunity to flu.

Children who don’t get the vaccine are also not at risk of catching flu from the vaccine, either by being at school during immunisation days or by being in contact with a child who has recently had the vaccine. Keeping children off school during the period when the vaccine is being offered, or in the following weeks, is therefore not necessary.

The only exception to this would be children who are extremely immunocompromised (for example those who have just had a bone marrow transplant). These children are normally advised not to attend school anyway because of the much higher risk of being in contact with other infections, including the natural flu infection, that spread in schools.

Parental consent

Boxes of consent packs will be delivered to each school – it’s important that these are distributed for pupils to take home as soon as they arrive. The consent pack contains a named invitation letter, consent form and a leaflet with relevant information for parents and carers. Please use school methods to remind parents to return these.

Easy Read format and translations available

The flu materials are available in Easy Read format and are translated into several languages, including Polish, Mandarin (Simplified Chinese) and Arabic. Please make sure parents of children who speak these languages are aware of where to find these alternative formats online. The translated primary school leaflet can be found online at: www.nhsinform.scot/childflu – click Further information. Hard copies may be made available on request.

Where to direct parents’ and carers’ queries

- If parents or carers of children raise any concerns about the immunisation programme, or have specific queries, you should signpost them to:
  www.nhsinform.scot/childflu

  the NHS inform helpline 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88) or the local NHS Health Board – the phone number is provided on their invitation letter.

- If a parent or carer changes their mind, they need to withdraw consent in writing. You should advise parents and carers to contact their local NHS Health Board as soon as possible.

- If a parent or carer is struggling to fill in the consent form, you might want to consider offering drop-in sessions to help and refer to the Consent Form Guidance enclosed. The guidance is available online at: www.nhsinform.scot/childflu – click Further Information.
Hints and tips for preparing for flu immunisation

Consent packs

• Consent packs will be delivered to schools and should be distributed immediately to parents and carers via the pupils.

• The consent packs are pre-printed and will be provided to you ready to distribute. Make teachers aware, before they give out the packs, that forms are personalised for each child.

• Blank consent packs are provided, to be used if a personalised form for a pupil is missing.

• Parents and carers need to return their completed consent forms to school as soon as possible.

• Ensure that all class teachers know where to return the parental consent forms. The consent forms should be returned in their envelopes.

• Where possible, remind parents through your communications (Twitter, newsletter, group text, etc.) to return their completed consent form as soon as possible.

• If a parent or carer loses their consent pack and needs a new one, they should be advised to contact their local NHS Health Board.

• Your local NHS Health Board will arrange a date with you to collect returned parental consent forms.

• If a parent or carer informs you of any changes since the consent was returned to school, ask for confirmation of this in writing to be given to the NHS Board.

Getting the children ready

• You may wish to show the You and flu video clip (aimed at children) at school assemblies or pass it on to teachers to show in class.

• School staff may wish to use the Classroom activity sheet when introducing the programme to children.

• You may wish to display the posters provided to raise awareness of the flu immunisation programme and the date(s) it will take place in your school.
Planning for the immunisation sessions

• Ensure you keep the agreed day for your school immunisation session free. Please do not book trips out of school for any children on this agreed date.

• An immunisation team or nurse will visit your school to deliver the immunisations.

• Where possible, send a group text to parents reminding them about the vaccine date(s) two to three working days before the immunisation sessions.

• Ensure that school staff are well briefed about the immunisation session and what might be required from them on the day.

• Liaise with the immunisation team or nurse to scope out their requirements for the day (room size, tables, chairs, etc.). They will bring clinical equipment including hand gel for the sessions, and any clinical waste will be removed at the end for disposal.

• It would be helpful if you could prepare sticky labels for children in P1 to P3, clearly showing the child’s name and date of birth. These can be put on the child’s clothing before they come to the immunisation session, to avoid any confusion over names and help reduce the risk of an immunisation error. You can discuss this with the immunisation team or nurse.

• It’s important to have good movement in and out of the immunisation room. Children will need to be brought in groups for immunisation. You may want to consider some alternative arrangements for children that will not be immunised on the day.

• Precautionary measures should be planned in the unlikely event these are required (for example, an area for a child to lie down, and a procedure for calling and directing an ambulance).

After the immunisation sessions

• If a child misses the immunisation session at school, arrangements may be in place for a ‘mop-up’ session. Those parents and carers should be directed to the local NHS Health Board phone number provided on their invitation letter.

• All parents and carers will receive a post-immunisation advice leaflet on the same day that the immunisation has taken place. The leaflet provides information about the common side effects of the flu vaccine.

For more information on flu immunisation, or for any frequently asked questions, school staff can visit: www.nhsinform.scot/childflu, phone NHS inform on 0800 22 44 88 or email nhs.inform@nhs24.scot.nhs.uk

For more specific information on the national flu programme roll-out, you can contact your local school health team.