



The facts are:

- flu causes severe illness and deaths each year particularly among at-risk groups, including: older people; pregnant women; and those with a long-term health condition, even one that is well managed. This is why flu vaccination is offered to the at-risk groups each year before the flu virus starts to circulate
- vaccination is the best protection we have against the unpredictable influenza virus. It is crucial that if you are eligible, you get vaccinated early before people start getting flu
- the flu virus continually changes and evolves – it is unpredictable. In February each year, the World Health Organisation recommends the strains of flu virus that should be included in the flu vaccine for the Northern hemisphere for the forthcoming season. These strains are those predicted to circulate in the coming season. There is always the possibility that the virus will change (drift) after the point at which vaccine strain selection has taken place, although this is unusual
- the decision on flu vaccine strains needs to be made in February by the World Health Organisation because it takes six to seven months for vaccine manufacturers to produce sufficient quantities of the vaccine for the Northern hemisphere
- generally there has been a good match between the strains of flu in the vaccine and those that subsequently circulate in the community resulting in protection of around 50% (ranging from 30 to 70%)
- in 2014 to 2015, the adult flu vaccine used in the UK was found to be 34% effective against the circulating strains of flu. This was towards the lower end of the range but higher than the figure reported during the flu season.

Expanding the child flu vaccination programme this year:

- this year, all children aged 2-4, and children in school year 1 and 2, will be offered flu vaccine
- vaccinating children each year will not only provide important protection to the child, but also protect their close family and contacts because children are more likely to transmit the virus to others, including those in the at-risk groups
- the flu vaccine for children is a nasal spray and is different to the adult vaccine which is a jab
- we have already seen evidence from pilot programmes in England that the child flu vaccine reduces the rates of illness in both vaccinated age-groups, but also in unvaccinated groups
- Public Health England has published a blog answering some common questions around flu vaccine effectiveness and drift. It can be viewed by searching 'flu vaccine' at <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk>