

Questions and answers about the swine flu vaccination programme

Scientists have now developed a vaccine. Here we answer some of the most common questions about the vaccine and who will receive it first.

Who will be vaccinated?

People who are most at risk from swine flu need to be vaccinated first. These groups are, in order of priority:

1. People between six months and 65 years old who usually get the seasonal flu jab;
2. Pregnant women, subject to licensing conditions on trimesters. The EMeA license will indicate whether the vaccine can be given to all pregnant women or whether it should only be offered at certain stages of pregnancy;
3. People who live with those whose immune systems are compromised, such as cancer patients or people with HIV/AIDS;
4. People aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at-risk groups.

And why aren't children included in the priority groups?

If a child has an underlying health condition and usually has the seasonal flu jab they will need to be vaccinated against swine flu. Otherwise it is important that we prioritise those who need it most.

If I am in a priority group is it compulsory to be vaccinated?

No, the swine flu vaccine is voluntary. However, we strongly encourage everyone in an at-risk group to have it.

Ultimately, it is down to an individual to decide whether they, or any children in their care, have a vaccine or not. This is the same for all vaccines, not just swine flu.

What is a 'household contact'?

If you live with someone whose immune system is compromised, such as someone with cancer or HIV/AIDS, then you are classified as a 'household contact'. It is important that you have the vaccine to help protect the at-risk person you live with.

I've already had swine flu, do I still need to be vaccinated?

You can only be certain that you've had swine flu if it was confirmed by a laboratory test. Otherwise, you may have had normal flu or something else. Unless you know for sure that you had swine flu, and are in one of the high risk groups listed, you should have the vaccination.

THE VACCINE

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. People will only be vaccinated after it has been licensed by the European Medicine Agency (EMeA).

Will the vaccine give me swine flu?

No. The vaccine does not carry a 'live' virus so it can't give you swine flu.

Does the vaccine have any side effects?

Aside from a slightly sore arm some people may experience mild fever up to 48 hours. This happens as their immune system responds to the vaccine, but it's not flu.

As with most vaccines, the most common side effects are a mild fever, general aches and pains, a rash and feeling tired. These will usually go away within a day or two. If you are concerned about side effects, talk to your GP.

Can I have the swine flu vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes. The swine flu vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines including the seasonal flu jab (if it is available to the surgery at the time)

I'm worried about swine flu but I'm not in a priority group – what do I do?

People in the priority groups are more at risk of becoming seriously ill from swine flu. Most other people will only have mild symptoms.

If you think that you might have swine flu, stay at home and contact the National Pandemic Flu Service at www.direct.gov.uk/pandemic flu or call 0800 1 513 100. They can give you advice and, if necessary, provide you with antiviral drugs.