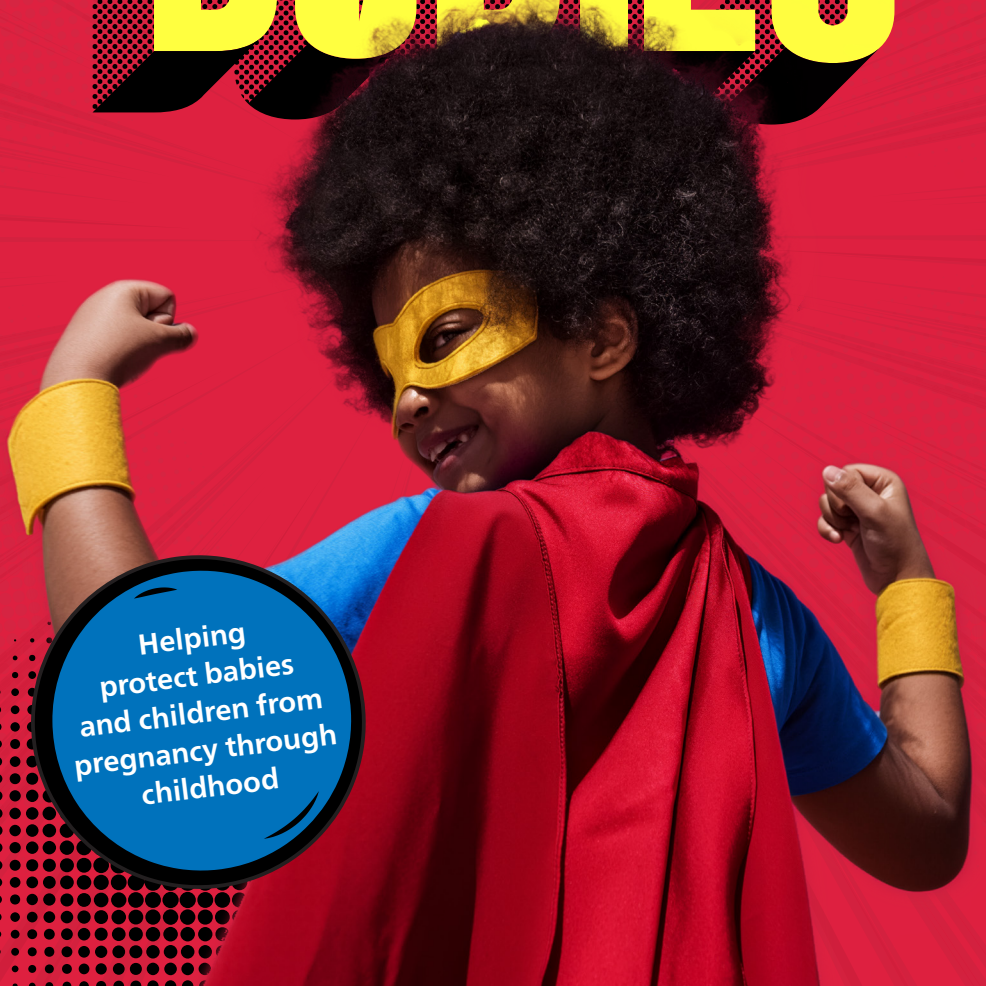


CHILDREN'S
HEALTH
MATTERS

NHS

SUPER BODIES



Helping
protect babies
and children from
pregnancy through
childhood

Their Super Body starts before you meet them

Vaccines help your body fight off infections.

During pregnancy, vaccines can help protect both you and your baby from serious illnesses.

The protection you develop is passed to your baby before birth, helping to keep them safe during their first few weeks and months of life.



Help kick-start their Super Body

Three vaccines are offered during pregnancy to help protect you, your baby or both.

Whooping cough

Whooping cough can be very serious for young babies. Many babies who become seriously ill catch it in their first weeks of life, before they can have their own vaccinations.

The vaccine is usually offered at around 20 weeks of pregnancy. You can have it from 16 weeks.

The antibodies your body makes pass to your baby before birth, helping protect them during these first vulnerable weeks.

Around 90% effective at preventing whooping cough in newborn babies.

RSV

RSV is a common virus that can cause a serious lung infection called bronchiolitis in babies.

The RSV vaccine is offered from 28 weeks of pregnancy.

Antibodies pass to your baby before they are born and help protect them from RSV from birth.

70% lower risk of severe bronchiolitis during their first six months.

Flu

Flu can be more serious when you are pregnant and can cause complications for you and your pregnancy.

You can have the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy during the flu vaccination programme.

It helps protect you from serious flu. Antibodies also pass to your baby, giving them some protection during their first few months of life.

Babies are around 70% less likely to be admitted to hospital with flu during their first six months if their mother had the flu vaccine during pregnancy.

Protection before they're even born

Have each vaccine when it is offered. You do not need to wait to have them together.

Speak to your midwife, maternity team, GP surgery or pharmacist if you have questions about vaccines during pregnancy.

Their Super Body keeps growing

Your child's body is amazing.

Every day, their immune system fights off lots of common bugs and infections.

Most coughs, colds, sore throats and earaches get better on their own with rest, fluids and time.

But flu can be different.

Flu is much more than a bad cold. It can make children very unwell, including children who are usually fit and healthy. Some children need hospital care.

Give their Super Body extra protection from flu

The free NHS flu vaccine helps reduce your child's risk of getting flu and becoming seriously ill.

It can also help reduce the spread of flu to other people.

Quick and easy

Most children have the flu vaccine as a quick nasal spray.

It only takes a few seconds.

Some children will be offered a flu vaccine injection instead.

Protection every winter

Flu viruses can change, so eligible children are offered a flu vaccine every year.

Having the vaccine each winter gives them the best protection against the flu viruses expected to be circulating.



Who can get the free NHS flu vaccine?

Children aged two and three

Children who were aged two or three on **31 August 2026** can get a free NHS flu vaccine.

From **1 September**, they can get vaccinated through their GP surgery.

From **1 October**, participating community pharmacies can also vaccinate children aged two and three.

School-aged children

Children from **Reception to Year 11** will usually be offered their flu vaccine at school during the autumn term.

If your child misses their vaccination, catch-up appointments will be available.

Children who are home educated can also get their vaccine through the local school-aged immunisation service.

From 1 December, participating pharmacies can also vaccinate school-aged children who missed the chance to have it through the school programme.

Children with some long-term health conditions

Children aged **six months to 17 years** with some long-term health conditions can also get a free flu vaccine.

This includes some conditions that affect:

- breathing
- the heart, kidneys or liver
- the brain or nerves
- the immune system.

Children with diabetes, sickle cell disease or a learning disability may also be eligible.

If you are not sure, speak to your child's GP surgery or specialist.



Super Families – Protecting your whole family

Vaccination can help protect your family at every stage – from pregnancy and your baby's first months through to childhood.

Vaccinating your child against flu can also help protect:

- babies who are too young for some vaccinations
- grandparents and older relatives
- people with long-term health conditions
- people with weaker immune systems.

Children can easily bring flu home from school or childcare.

Getting vaccinated when it is offered is one way your family can help protect each other.



Common questions answered

Will the flu vaccine weaken my child's Super Body?

No.

Vaccines help your child's immune system learn how to recognise and fight specific infections.

Their immune system can still deal with the many other bugs they meet every day.

Does my child really need it?

Flu can make children seriously unwell, including children who are usually fit and healthy.

Vaccination reduces their chance of getting flu and becoming seriously ill.

What about side effects?

The nasal spray flu vaccine is very safe.

Some children may have a runny or blocked nose, feel tired or have less appetite for a short time.

Serious side effects are very rare.

My child has a long-term health condition. Is it safe?

Children with some long-term health conditions are more at risk of becoming seriously ill from flu.

Vaccination is especially important for them.

Speak to your child's GP surgery or specialist if you have questions.

Is there an alternative to the nasal spray?

Yes.

The nasal spray contains a small amount of gelatine from pigs, known as porcine gelatine.

An injected flu vaccine that does not contain gelatine is available if you do not want your child to have the nasal spray because of its ingredients.

Some children also need the injected vaccine for medical reasons.

Speak to the person vaccinating your child about the options available.

Common winter illnesses

Your child's Super Body is good at fighting off many common winter illnesses.

Most get better on their own with rest, fluids and time.

Remember:

- many common winter illnesses are caused by viruses
- antibiotics do not work against viruses
- antibiotics should only be used when prescribed by a healthcare professional
- rest, fluids and care can help your child while their body fights the infection.



Coughs

Coughs are common in winter and often follow a cold or other viral infection.

What to expect

A cough:

- can last for up to three weeks
- may sound dry, chesty or phlegmy.

What can help

Try:

- plenty of fluids
- warm drinks
- honey for children over one year old
- plenty of rest.

When to get help

Get medical advice if:

- your child is finding it hard to breathe or is working hard to breathe
- they have a high temperature that lasts for five days or more
- their cough is getting worse rather than better
- you are worried about them.

Sore throats

Sore throats are often caused by a virus and usually get better on their own.

What to expect

Most sore throats:

- get better within a week
- may come with a runny nose, cough or high temperature.

What can help

Try:

- plenty of fluids
- cool drinks and soft foods
- plenty of rest
- children's paracetamol or ibuprofen if suitable for your child.

Always follow the instructions on the medicine.

When to get help

Get medical advice if your child:

- cannot swallow
- is drooling
- has a stiff neck
- has a very high temperature
- develops a rash
- seems seriously unwell.

Earache

Earache often follows a cold and, in many cases, gets better without antibiotics.

What can help

Try:

- suitable pain relief, such as children's paracetamol or ibuprofen
- a warm cloth held against the ear.

When to get help

Get medical advice if:

- there is fluid coming from the ear
- your child has a high temperature
- the earache is not getting better
- infections keep coming back
- you are worried about their hearing.

Need advice?

If you are worried about your child, you can access services including NHS 111 and Pharmacy First.

NHS 111

Call 111 or visit NHS 111 online at: 111.nhs.uk for advice. If your child is under five, it's best to call and speak to someone.

Pharmacy First

Many pharmacies can help with common illnesses without an appointment. This includes:

- earaches (aged one to 17 years)
- sore throats (age five and over).

Find your nearest pharmacy at communitypharmacy.org.uk and select 'NHS Pharmacy First Service'.

In an emergency, call 999.

Colds and runny noses

Colds are caused by viruses, so antibiotics will not help.

What to expect

Your child may have:

- a runny nose
- sneezing
- a mild cough
- a high temperature.

Most colds get better within about one to two weeks.

What can help

Try:

- plenty of fluids
- rest
- gently wiping their nose
- saline nose drops to help babies with a blocked nose.

When to get help

Get medical advice if your child:

- is having problems breathing
- shows signs of dehydration
- is very sleepy or difficult to wake
- seems seriously unwell.

High temperatures

A high temperature is one way the body responds to infection.

It does not always mean something is seriously wrong.

A high temperature in children is 38°C or above.

What can help

Make sure your child:

- drinks plenty of fluids
- gets plenty of rest.

You can give children's paracetamol or ibuprofen if they are distressed or uncomfortable and the medicine is suitable for them.

Always follow the instructions on the medicine.

When to get help

Get medical advice if:

- your baby is under three months old and has a temperature of 38°C or above
- your child's high temperature lasts for five days or more
- your child has a seizure
- your child develops a rash
- you are worried about them.

Help their Super Body stay strong

- ✓ Get their flu vaccine when it is offered.
- ✓ Give them plenty to drink.
- ✓ Encourage regular handwashing.
- ✓ Use antibiotics only when prescribed by a healthcare professional.
- ✓ Make sure they get plenty of rest when they are unwell.
- ✓ Ask for help if you are worried about your child.



A well-stocked medicine cupboard can help you manage common childhood illnesses and minor injuries.



Myth busters:

Setting the record straight with Dr Sooraj Natarajan



As a local GP, I hear lots of questions from parents, carers and people who are pregnant about vaccines. Here are the facts to help you make informed choices for you and your family.

✗ Myth:

Flu is just a bad cold

✓ Fact:

Flu can make children seriously unwell, including children who are usually fit and healthy. Some children need hospital treatment.

✗ Myth:

The flu vaccine can give you flu

✓ Fact:

Flu vaccines cannot give you flu. Your child may have mild side effects after vaccination, but these usually get better quickly.

✗ Myth:

They had the flu vaccine last year, so they are still protected

✓ Fact:

Flu viruses can change. The vaccine is offered every year to give eligible children the best protection.

✗ Myth:

Vaccines overload a child's immune system

✓ Fact:

Children's immune systems deal with lots of germs every day. Vaccines help their immune system learn how to recognise and fight specific infections.

✗ Myth:

Natural infection is better than vaccination

✓ Fact:

Getting an infection can sometimes lead to serious illness and complications. Vaccines give protection without having to get the disease first.

✗ Myth:

The MMR vaccine causes autism

✓ Fact:

There is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism.

✗ Myth:

Vaccines during pregnancy could harm my baby

✓ Fact:

The flu, whooping cough and RSV vaccines are recommended during pregnancy to help protect you, your baby or both.

Some of the antibodies your body makes after vaccination pass to your baby before they are born.

Vaccines help protect Super Bodies

Protection can start before birth and continue as your child grows.

Vaccines during pregnancy and childhood help protect babies and children



What families say...

RACHAEL, 40, FROM BENFLEET

"I didn't realise pregnant women were eligible for the flu vaccine until one of my antenatal appointments.

"I looked it up on the NHS website and saw that it could help protect my baby before and after birth.

"I had the vaccine during both of my pregnancies. It was just a quick jab in the arm and I only had a bit of soreness afterwards.

"I'm so glad I did it. It gave me peace of mind and helped keep my babies protected during those early months."

"It could help protect my baby before and after birth."

PARENT OF TWO BOYS, AGED SEVEN AND FIVE

"When the school offered the flu nasal spray, it made sense to protect both of my boys.

"I thought it might be an injection at first and was worried it would upset them, but the information from the school explained everything clearly.

"For the sake of a quick spray up the nose, it can save your family a lot of stress when flu is going around."

SARAH, FROM SOUTHEND

"I've got two little ones – one is three and the other just four months.

"I get the flu vaccine every year myself, and with my older child having some health conditions, it made sense to get them protected too.

"I'll definitely be vaccinating again this year."

TOM, FROM SOUTHEND

"I used to think flu was just a bad cold – until I had it myself and ended up in hospital.

"That experience changed everything. I wouldn't wish it on my child.

"I'll definitely be getting him vaccinated again this year."



Where to get help

If you're pregnant

For advice about vaccines during pregnancy:

- speak to your midwife or maternity team
- contact your GP surgery
- speak to a community pharmacist.

The flu, whooping cough and RSV vaccines are given as injections in the arm.

Common side effects are usually mild and can include a sore arm, headache, muscle aches, mild fever or tiredness.

For your child

For information about your child's flu vaccine:

- contact their GP surgery
- ask their school
- speak to a community pharmacist
- contact the local school-aged immunisation service.

If your child misses their school flu vaccination, catch-up options are available.

If your child is unwell

You know your child best.

If you are worried about their symptoms or they are getting worse:

- contact your GP surgery
- use NHS 111 online or call 111
- get urgent medical help if needed.

Call 999 in a life-threatening emergency.

The facts about the children's flu vaccine

The NHS flu vaccine is:

Free: for eligible children.

Quick: most children have a nasal spray that takes seconds.

Needle-free for most children: an injected vaccine is also available when needed.

Offered every year: because flu viruses can change.

Protective: it reduces the chance of your child getting flu and becoming seriously ill.

Good for the wider family: vaccinating children can also help reduce the spread of flu.

Help protect their Super Body from the very beginning

From pregnancy through childhood, vaccination can help protect babies and children from serious illness.