# NHS extends free nasal flu spray to pharmacies for toddlers to boost uptake



For the first time, toddlers in England will be able to receive the free NHS nasal flu spray at nearly 4,000 pharmacies, as part of efforts to boost vaccination uptake. Previously, the spray was only administered at GP surgeries for two and three-year-olds, but the expansion to pharmacies now offers parents greater convenience and choice. Appointments can be booked or parents can attend walk-in sessions at local high streets or supermarkets. This initiative aims to increase the number of children protected ahead of the winter months, during which flu tends to circulate widely.

Last year, only a little over 42% of eligible two and three-year-olds took up the offer of the nasal spray, representing a slight decline from the previous year. NHS figures highlight that thousands of children without underlying health conditions require hospital care each winter due to flu. The nasal spray not only protects children but also helps shield vulnerable family members, such as the elderly, who face higher risks of serious illness from flu. Around 1.2 million toddlers are eligible for the free vaccination.

Health officials emphasise the ease and importance of the vaccine. Duncan Burton, chief nursing officer for England, noted that flu can make young children seriously unwell and that vaccination remains the best defence. Dr Suzanna McDonald from the UK Health Security Agency underscored that thousands of children end up in hospital with flu annually, urging timely vaccination. The vaccination programme principally uses a nasal spray for children, though an injectable vaccine is available as an option.

To further improve accessibility, NHS England is also deploying mobile vaccination units and offering vaccines in nurseries, particularly in areas where uptake has traditionally been low. This complements the vaccination services already provided in GP surgeries and schools for older children. The NHS has also set up an online service to help parents locate pharmacies offering free flu vaccinations, with immunisation starting from 1 October 2025 at pharmacies and 1 September at GP surgeries.

Pharmacies participating in the programme will be reimbursed for providing the vaccine, with arrangements made to support them alongside GP practices. Community Pharmacy England’s chief executive, Janet Morrison, highlighted that pharmacies' presence in key localities—where people live, work, and shop—should simplify the process for busy families.

Health Minister Ashley Dalton pointed to last winter’s impact on hospital bed availability, with flu accounting for over 300,000 bed days, stressing the urgency to prevent a repeat strain on the NHS this winter through expanded vaccination availability closer to home.

This move aligns with similar initiatives in Ireland, where the Health Service Executive has launched a free nasal spray flu vaccination programme for children aged 2 to 17 years, offered through GP practices, pharmacies, and some schools. Like the NHS’s programme, the Irish nasal spray vaccine is painless, quick, and designed to protect both children and the wider community.

Parents should note that while the nasal spray is the primary vaccine used for children, those with contraindications or certain health conditions may receive the injection instead. The nasal spray is safe and effective, although children should not receive it if unwell on the day of vaccination. Mild side effects such as a runny nose or fatigue can occur but typically resolve within a couple of days.

In summary, the NHS’s decision to extend flu vaccination services for toddlers to pharmacies is a strategic response to low uptake levels, aiming to provide easier access and convenience for families while enhancing community protection against flu during the colder months.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[5]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html), [[6]](https://cpsc.org.uk/news/latest-cpsc-news/childrens-flu-vaccination-advanced-service)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[5]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[5]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[2]](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-flu-vaccination/), [[6]](https://cpsc.org.uk/news/latest-cpsc-news/childrens-flu-vaccination-advanced-service)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[5]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html), [[6]](https://cpsc.org.uk/news/latest-cpsc-news/childrens-flu-vaccination-advanced-service)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[4]](https://about.hse.ie/news/hse-launches-childrens-free-nasal-spray-flu-vaccination-programme-for-children-aged-2-17-years/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/flu-vaccine-children-nasal-spray-b2214507.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/), [[5]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html), [[6]](https://cpsc.org.uk/news/latest-cpsc-news/childrens-flu-vaccination-advanced-service), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/flu-vaccine-children-nasal-spray-b2214507.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/toddlers-to-be-offered-free-flu-spray-in-pharmacies-for-the-first-time-JN2BUXKGTJMMTJHI6EP6TJWKFY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-flu-vaccination/> - The NHS provides a service to locate pharmacies offering free flu vaccinations for children aged 2 to 3 years and adults aged 18 or over. Appointments can be booked online, with vaccinations starting from 1 October 2025. Pharmacies will also offer walk-in sessions from this date. The service is currently closed but will reopen when winter flu vaccines are available. Children aged 2 to 3 years can get vaccinated at their GP surgery from 1 September 2025 and at participating pharmacies from 1 October 2025. Most other children aged 17 and under will be offered vaccination at school or can be vaccinated at their GP surgery or a community clinic. Pregnant individuals can get a flu vaccine from their GP surgery or maternity service from 1 September 2025 and at participating pharmacies from 1 October 2025. Health and social care workers eligible for a flu vaccine on the NHS do not need to show ID at a pharmacy, but a letter from their employer may help. Some employers offer vouchers for a free flu vaccine at participating pharmacies. The service also provides information on who is eligible for a free flu vaccination and how to find a participating pharmacy. The page was last reviewed on 29 August 2025, with the next review due on 2 August 2027.
3. <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-flu-vaccination/> - The NHS offers a service to find pharmacies that provide free flu vaccinations. This service is currently closed and will reopen when winter flu vaccines are available. The NHS will contact individuals if their record suggests they may be eligible for a free flu vaccination. Children under 18 years old cannot get a flu vaccination at a pharmacy; they may be able to get it from their GP surgery or school. Health and social care workers eligible for a flu vaccine on the NHS do not need to show ID at a pharmacy, but a letter from their employer may help. Some employers offer vouchers for a free flu vaccine at participating pharmacies. The page was last reviewed on 3 September 2024, with the next review due on 2 August 2027.
4. <https://about.hse.ie/news/hse-launches-childrens-free-nasal-spray-flu-vaccination-programme-for-children-aged-2-17-years/> - The Health Service Executive (HSE) in Ireland launched a free nasal spray flu vaccination programme for children aged 2 to 17 years. The vaccine is available for free at participating GP practices and pharmacies, with some also offering it in primary schools. Dr. Lucy Jessop, Consultant in Public Health Medicine at the HSE National Immunisation Office, emphasized the importance of vaccinating children to protect them and those around them. The nasal spray vaccine is quick, painless, and effective. Parents are encouraged to talk to a participating GP or pharmacy about getting their child vaccinated for free. The page was last updated on 23 June 2025.
5. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/toddlers-leicester-flu-nhs-gp-surgery-b2832406.html> - The Independent reports that toddlers will be able to receive the free NHS nasal flu spray in pharmacies for the first time, aiming to increase uptake. Traditionally, the spray was administered to two and three-year-olds at their local GP surgery. Now, nearly 4,000 pharmacies in England have signed up to deliver the spray, offering parents more choice. Parents can book appointments or attend walk-in sessions. The initiative aims to increase the uptake of the spray, with figures showing that just over two in five eligible children took up the offer last year. Between 2024/25, some 42.6% of two and three-year-olds took up the offer of the nasal spray, a slight decrease compared to 2023/24. The NHS states that each winter in the UK, thousands of children without health conditions need hospital care because of flu. The spray can protect them and those around them, such as elderly family members who are at high risk of getting seriously ill from flu. Some 1.2 million toddlers are eligible for the free nasal spray. NHS England is trying to make it as convenient as possible for people to get protected. In areas of low uptake, vaccines will be offered in nurseries and mobile vaccination buses. Most children are given a nasal spray, but some can opt for an injection instead. Health Minister Ashley Dalton stated that by extending vaccination services to high street pharmacies, families can get vital protection closer to home before the cold months hit. Last winter alone, flu accounted for more than 300,000 hospital bed days, and a repeat of that on the NHS this winter is not desired. The page was last updated on 22 September 2025.
6. <https://cpsc.org.uk/news/latest-cpsc-news/childrens-flu-vaccination-advanced-service> - Community Pharmacy South Central announced a new Community Pharmacy flu vaccination service for children aged 2–3 years, starting from 1 October 2025. This service aims to support GP surgery colleagues in increasing vaccine uptake. Most eligible children will receive the Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) nasal spray, ordered and supplied from centrally supplied stock. Pharmacies opting in will be paid £9.58 per vaccination, funded from outside the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) global sum. Pharmacy owners can sign up to provide the service via the MYS portal between 1st and 31st August 2025. The GP service will start on 1st September. The page was last updated on 25 July 2025.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/flu-vaccine-children-nasal-spray-b2214507.html> - The Independent provides information on the eligibility and administration of the nasal spray flu vaccine for children. The vaccine is administered as a spray squirted up each nostril and is both a quick and painless process, although it can take up to two weeks to take effect. The spray is free on the NHS to children aged two or three as of 31 August 2022 (born between 1 September 2018 and 31 August 2020), to all primary school children (from Reception to Year Six), to some secondary school-aged children, and to others between two and 17 with long-term health conditions. Infants aged between six months and two years old with a pre-existing health condition will be offered the vaccine as an injection rather than a spray, an alternative also available to other eligible youngsters in the event that the simpler means of administration proves unsuitable. Children aged two or under will be treated with the vaccine at their GP’s clinic while those in primary or secondary education can have it administered by a nurse at school, or at a community clinic or immunisation centre in the event that they are homeschooled. The only circumstances in which a child should not receive the spray is if they are unwell on the day of their appointment, for instance with a blocked or runny nose or a high temperature, in which case they should wait until they have recovered. In rare cases, the recipient of the spray might experience some mild side effects, such as a runny or blocked nose, headache, tiredness or a loss of appetite, while those who have the injection might feel a slight aching of the muscles or a sore arm, but these conditions should pass in a day or two. The page was last updated on 22 September 2022.