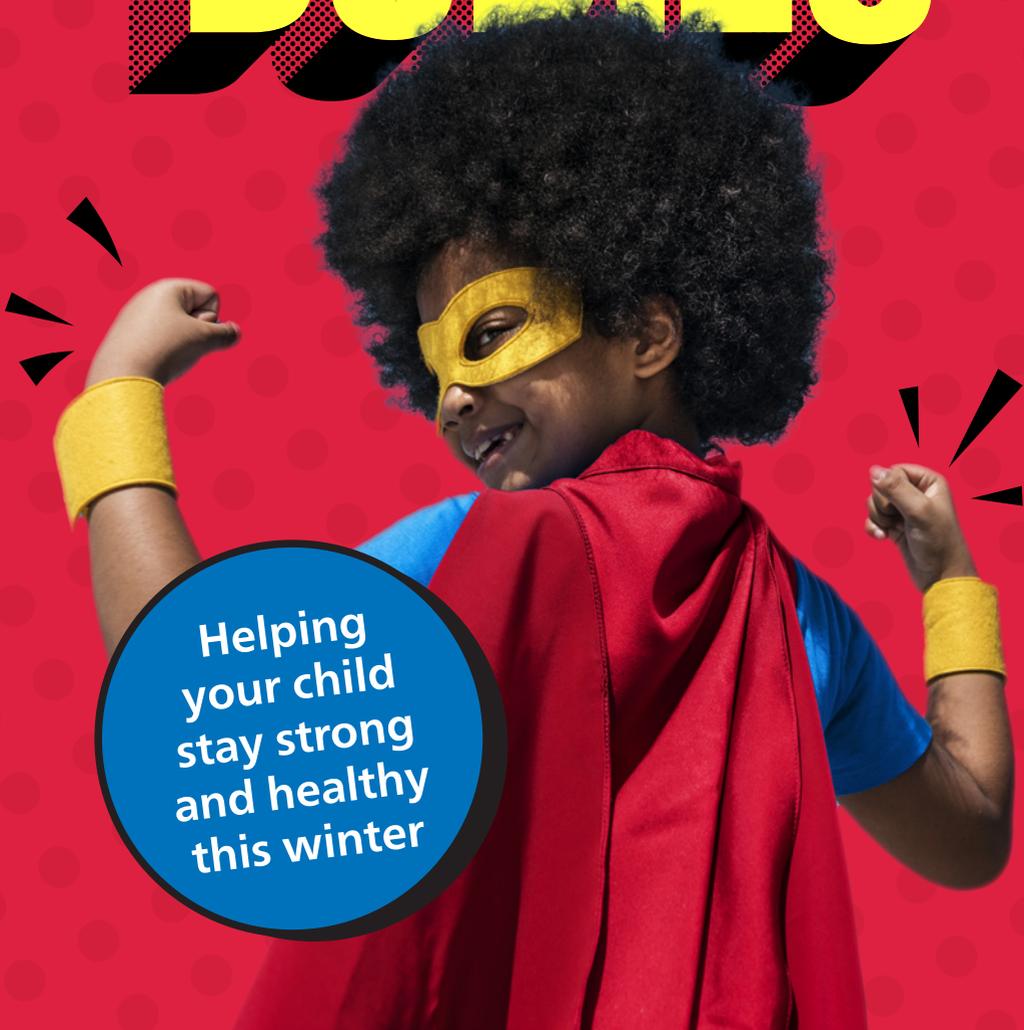


CHILDREN'S
HEALTH
MATTERS

NHS

SUPER BODIES



Helping
your child
stay strong
and healthy
this winter

Your child's body is amazing.

It's designed to fight off many winter bugs on its own.

Their Super Body can usually manage coughs, sore throats and earaches without antibiotics.

But flu is different – it can weaken even the strongest Super Body.

That's where the flu vaccine comes in. It helps strengthen your child's defence shield, giving them extra power to stay strong this winter.



Who can get the free flu vaccine?

Children aged 2–3 years

(Born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2023)

- available at your GP surgery
- at a community pharmacy
- you'll get an invitation in autumn or early winter.

School-aged children

(Reception to Year 11)

- given in school during the autumn term
- missed it? Home-schooled? Speak to the Essex community and school-aged immunisation service by calling 0300 555 5055 and selecting option 6
- 4-year-olds not yet at school can get it via their GP.

Children with long-term health conditions

(6 months–17 years)

Including:

- asthma (requiring steroid inhalers/tablets)
- cystic fibrosis, heart or kidney disease
- diabetes, weakened immune system, or sickle cell
- brain or nerve conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy)
- learning disabilities.

If you are unsure check with your child's GP, specialist or the NHS.uk website.

Why the flu vaccine matters?

Flu can be serious

Unlike common colds, flu can make children very unwell. Every year, children are admitted to hospital with flu complications, and sadly, some children die from flu. The free flu vaccine helps protect your child and those around them.

It's quick and easy

Just a simple nasal spray - no needles! It's often given at school or your GP surgery, making it convenient for busy families.

Safe and effective

The flu vaccine is safe, doesn't cause flu, and is recommended every year. It's been given to millions of children across the UK.



Pregnant? Protect your baby before they're born.

From 28 weeks, you can get the RSV vaccine to help protect your baby from a virus that can cause serious illness in newborns.

By having the RSV vaccine during pregnancy, you're passing on protection to your baby – helping kick-start their Super Body before they even arrive.

Protecting your whole family

By vaccinating your child, you're not just protecting them - you're helping to protect:

- babies who are too young to be vaccinated
- grandparents whose immune systems may be weaker
- parents with long-term conditions like diabetes or heart disease.
- the wider community by stopping flu spreading.

Children often bring infections home from school and nursery. The flu vaccine creates a protective barrier around your whole family.



Common questions answered

Will the vaccine weaken my child's Super Body?

No - vaccination trains their Super Body to be stronger against flu, whilst still allowing it to naturally fight off other winter bugs.

Is it really necessary?

Yes. Flu spreads quickly in schools and can make children seriously unwell. Thousands of parents across Essex choose to protect their children with the flu vaccine each year.

What about side effects?

The nasal spray vaccine is very safe. Some children may get a runny nose or feel a bit tired, but serious side effects are extremely rare.

My child has a long-term condition - is it safe?

Children with conditions like asthma or diabetes are at higher risk from flu and are especially recommended to have the vaccine. Speak to your consultant or practice nurse if you have concerns.

Is there an alternative to the nasal spray?

The nasal spray vaccine contains a small amount of gelatine from pigs (porcine gelatine). A flu vaccine injection is available that does not contain gelatine. If you do not want your child to have the nasal spray vaccine, speak to the person vaccinating your child or ask for the flu vaccine injection on the school consent form.

Children who cannot have the nasal spray vaccine and children under the age of 2 years will also be offered a flu vaccine injection.

You can check the flu vaccine injection ingredients on the [NHS.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) website.



Common winter illness

Your child's Super Body is brilliant at fighting off common winter illnesses – most get better on their own with rest, fluids and time.

Remember:

- most winter illnesses are viral infections caused by viruses, not bacteria
- antibiotics won't help viral infections and can cause side effects if used unnecessarily
- your child's Super Body is designed to heal – support it with rest, fluids, and care.

Here's what you need to know:

Coughs

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

What to expect:

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

What helps:

- warm drinks and honey (over age 1)
- keeping your child hydrated
- opening windows briefly to improve air circulation.

When to seek help:

- if breathing is difficult, noisy or your child is working hard to breathe
- high temperature (fever) of 38C or more, lasting more than 5 days
- cough worsening rather than improving.

Sore throats

A sore throat is usually caused by a viral infection and gets better on its own.

What to expect:

- most clear up within 7 days
- may come with a runny nose, cough or mild fever.

What helps:

- age-appropriate Paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain
- cool drinks and soft foods
- Plenty of rest.

When to seek help:

- if your child can't swallow, is drooling or has a stiff neck
- very high fever or rash.

Earache

Many earaches are caused by viral infections and clear up without antibiotics.

What to expect:

- often follows a cold.
- can cause pain, irritability, or difficulty sleeping
- usually resolves within 8 days.

What helps:

- pain relief (Age-appropriate paracetamol/ibuprofen)
- warm compress against the ear.

When to seek help:

- high fever or discharge from the ear
- earache lasting more than 3 days
- repeated infections or concerns about hearing.

Colds and runny noses

Colds are caused by viruses, not bacteria – so antibiotics won't help.

What to expect:

- symptoms usually include runny nose, sneezing, mild cough and low fever
- can last around 5–10 days.

What helps:

- fluids, rest, and gentle nose-wiping
- saline nasal drops can help babies breathe more easily.

When to seek help:

- breathing problems, signs of dehydration, or your child is very drowsy.



Having a well-stocked medicine cupboard can help parents manage common childhood illnesses and minor injuries effectively. Scan the QR code for medicines advice.



Fevers

A fever is a sign the body is fighting infection. It doesn't always mean something serious.

What to expect:

- temperature over 38°C
- may come and go over a few days.

What helps:

- fluids and rest
- age-appropriate Paracetamol or ibuprofen if your child seems uncomfortable.

When to seek help:

- baby under 3 months with temp over 38°C
- fever lasting more than 5 days
- seizures, rash, or if your child seems seriously unwell.

Help your child's super body stay strong

- ✓ get the flu vaccine when offered - it protects against the bugs that spread quickly in schools.
- ✓ encourage handwashing to stop infections spreading at home and school.
- ✓ ensure plenty of rest during any illness.
- ✓ keep them hydrated.
- ✓ trust their Super Body to do its amazing work against common winter bugs.
- ✓ use antibiotics wisely - only when prescribed by a healthcare professional.



Myth busters: Setting the record straight with Dr Sooraj Natarajan



“As a local GP, I hear many concerns from parents about vaccines. Here are the facts to help you make informed decisions about your child’s health.”

✗ Myth:

Flu is just a bad cold.

✓ Fact:

Flu can cause serious illness, especially in young children and people with existing health conditions. Each year, healthy children are hospitalised with flu complications, and tragically, some children die from flu. It’s much more severe than a common cold.

✗ Myth:

The vaccine gives you flu.

✓ Fact:

The nasal spray contains weakened viruses that cannot cause flu. Your child might get a runny nose, but this isn’t flu.

✗ Myth:

They had it last year, so they’re protected.

✓ Fact:

Flu viruses change each year. That’s why the vaccine is updated annually to match the most common strains.

✗ Myth:

Vaccines overload a child’s immune system.

✓ Fact:

Vaccines use only a tiny portion of the immune system’s capability. Every day, children touch, eat, and encounter things that give their immune system much more to deal with than a vaccine does.

✗ Myth:

Natural immunity is better than vaccine-acquired immunity.

✓ Fact:

Natural infection can lead to serious complications. Vaccines offer safe, effective protection without the risks of the disease itself.

✗ Myth:

Vaccines contain harmful ingredients.

✓ Fact:

All vaccine ingredients are present in safe amounts and are thoroughly tested for safety and effectiveness.

✗ Myth:

Childhood illnesses like measles aren’t serious.

✓ Fact:

Measles can lead to pneumonia, brain inflammation, and even death. Vaccination helps prevent these severe outcomes.

✗ Myth:

The MMR vaccine causes autism.

✓ Fact:

There is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism. This myth stems from a discredited study that has been thoroughly debunked.

Vaccines build Super Bodies.

All childhood vaccinations help strengthen your child’s immune system and protect against serious illnesses.

You can view the full vaccination schedule on our website:



What parents say...

PARENT OF TWO BOYS, AGED 7 AND 5

As a mum of two, I've seen how quickly winter bugs can knock kids off their feet - especially my youngest, who has asthma and has struggled with his breathing since birth. When he gets a cold, it's not just a sniffle - it's a real worry. So when the school offered the flu nasal spray, it was a no-brainer to protect him, and his older brother too.

I'll be honest, I thought it might be an injection at first, and I was worried it would upset them. But the leaflet from the school's immunisation team explained everything clearly. It reassured me, and the boys were thrilled with their stickers afterwards!

Getting them vaccinated felt like the right thing to do. It's not just about protecting them, it's about keeping life on track. When your child is ill, everything stops: sleep, work, school, peace of mind. For the sake of a quick 'spritz' up the nose, you can save your family a lot of stress.

To any parent who's unsure, I'd say: is it worth the gamble? You wouldn't put your child in a car without a seatbelt — so why leave them unprotected from something that could be serious?

We'll definitely be doing it again this year.

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 not only was it safe — it could actually protect my baby before and after birth.

I didn't want to risk getting flu with a newborn, so I had the vaccine during both of my pregnancies. It was just a quick jab in the arm — no side effects, apart from a bit of soreness.

I'm so glad I did it. It gave me peace of mind and helped keep my babies safe during those early months. I'd definitely recommend it to other mums-to-be. It's better safe than sorry — especially when you've got a little one to think about.

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 just made sense to get them protected too. I didn't need convincing—it works, and that's enough for me. I didn't have any concerns, and after getting them vaccinated, I felt fine. Honestly, I'd just say to other parents: **just do it.** I'll definitely be vaccinating again this year. **Vaccinate your children!**



NATALIE FROM ESSEX

I'm mum to twin boys who are six. I always get my health info from our GP or NHS.uk, and I've never doubted the flu vaccine. It's safe, effective, and free - what more do you need? I didn't have a big "aha" moment, I just knew it was the right thing to do. The nurses were great and answered any questions I had. It feels good knowing they're protected, especially because we have older relatives to think about too. I'll be getting them vaccinated again this year. **It's safe - get your child vaccinated!**

LOUISE FROM ESSEX

I've got two kids—one is five and the other is just over a year. When the flu vaccine was offered, I didn't see any reason not to go for it. I get vaccinated myself, so it felt natural to do the same for them. I knew it helped prevent serious symptoms, and I was glad to be protecting my child from something that could make them really ill. There were no side effects, and the nasal spray doesn't hurt at all. I'll definitely do it again. **No pain, nasal spray - easy decision.**

**GILL FROM BILLERICAY**

I'm a grandmother to seven wonderful grandchildren. I've always encouraged my children to get them vaccinated. When I was younger, illnesses like measles could kill. I think people have forgotten how dangerous childhood diseases can be. I get my information from the doctor and online, and I see flu as just one step away from COVID and all the risks that come with it. My daughter was a bit unsure at first, especially when her children were very young, but she decided to go ahead. My advice? **Ask questions, get advice, and understand why it matters. These vaccines are here to keep your children well.**

TOM FROM SOUTHEND

I'm a dad to a three-year-old boy, and I believe it's important to protect not just my child, but everyone else's children and the wider community. I stay informed by reading trusted online sources of information and keeping up with the latest health advice. I used to think flu was just a bad cold—until I had it myself and ended up in hospital. That experience changed everything. After that, I didn't have any concerns about vaccinating my son, and I felt great knowing he was protected. To any parent who's unsure, I'd say: I had flu last year and it nearly took me out. I wouldn't wish that on my child or yours. Please check the latest evidence—it really helps give peace of mind. **Getting the vaccine is very convenient, and I'll definitely be vaccinating him again this year. It's quick, it's safe, and it costs nothing. Just do it.**

Where to get help

For flu vaccine information:

- ask at your child's school
- contact your GP surgery
- speak to your health visitor (under 5s)
- speak to the children's immunisation and vaccination service
- speak to your community pharmacist.

If you're worried about symptoms:

- trust your instincts - you know your child best
- contact your GP or call NHS 111
- seek urgent help if symptoms worsen.

For families who need extra support:

Community services are available to help you access healthcare and understand vaccination. Ask your local children's centre or health visitor.

The facts about flu vaccine

- free for all children aged 2-17
- safe - given to millions of children every year
- effective - significantly reduces risk of flu
- quick - takes seconds to give
- convenient - often available at school
- protective - helps safeguard your whole family.

Join thousands of parents across Essex who choose to protect their children with the flu vaccine.

For more information about Super Bodies and keeping your child healthy this winter, visit www.midandsouthessex.nhs.uk/childrens-health-matters or speak to your healthcare professional.

