

# FLU FIGHTER

**REAL LIFE STORIES INSIDE!**

What's your **FLU IQ?**

**Why are we looking down under?**




## REAL LIFE STORY

**"I came so close to dying and losing my baby"**

*Mum-to-be Joanne*



**MYTHBUSTERS**

**FIND OUT WHAT'S FALSE & WHAT'S TRUE ABOUT FLU...**



## Flu Protect yourself and others

Ask your GP about the vaccine today.

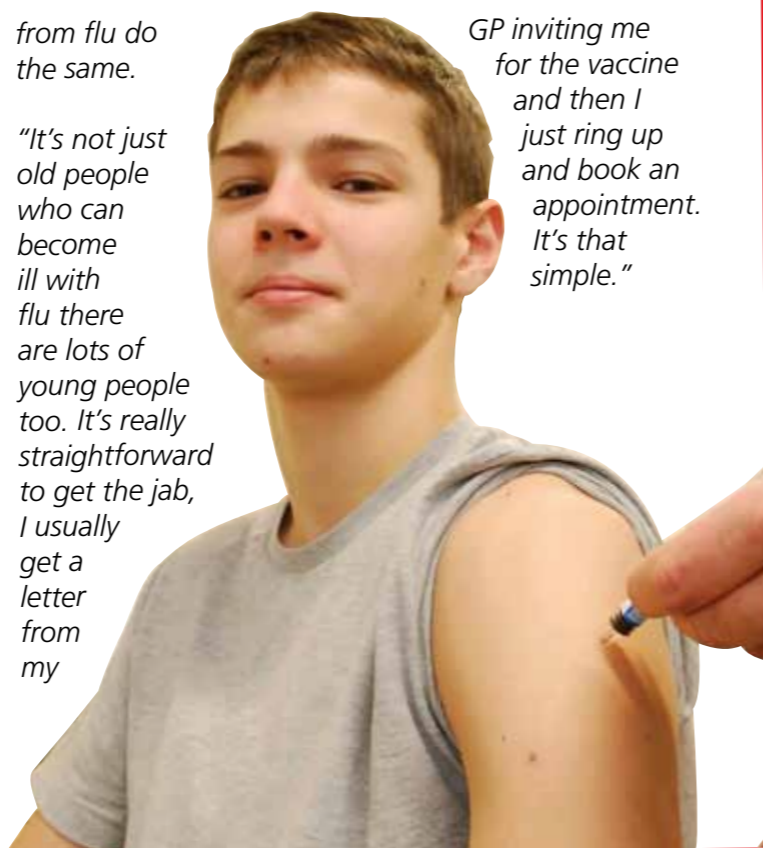
### "IT'S NOT JUST OLD PEOPLE WHO CAN GET ILL WITH FLU"

**Twenty year old Alex Brown of Corbridge in Northumberland has the seasonal flu jab every year.**

He was diagnosed with Crohn's disease at the age of ten and has a weakened immune system which means his body is less able to fight off any infections - including flu.

Alex said: "I take regular medication to control my Crohn's symptoms which means my energy levels are always quite low and my natural immune system is constantly reduced.

"I would much rather get the flu jab every year than risk catching flu and becoming seriously ill. The jab is free to people like me who are at risk and it doesn't take a minute. I have vaccine every year and have never had any negative side effects. I would definitely recommend that other people who are at risk



from flu do the same.

"It's not just old people who can become ill with flu there are lots of young people too. It's really straightforward to get the jab, I usually get a letter from my

GP inviting me for the vaccine and then I just ring up and book an appointment. It's that simple."



## Welcome to

# FLU FIGHTER



Over the past few years we've all seen just how serious flu can be, with people of all ages needing hospital treatment. Last winter lots of people were so ill with flu they ended up in intensive care.

Whether you are a pregnant woman, have a long term health problem, are over 65, caring for someone who is vulnerable or your child has a serious health condition - then you (or your child) are all eligible for the **FREE and safe flu jab**.

We don't want anyone to get ill from something which can be avoided. That's why the seasonal flu jab is so important and offers effective protection that lasts a whole year. Not only will you be protecting yourself, but also helping to stop the virus from spreading to other loved ones who may also be vulnerable.

Please do not to be complacent – flu can be very serious. Talk to your GP today to book a vaccination appointment.

*Tricia Cresswell*

Dr Tricia Cresswell  
Deputy medical director, NHS North East

**Over 800,000 people in the north east need the flu jab - only half got it last year. Are you putting yourself at risk?**

### Did you know?

All frontline health and social care workers also get the free flu jab to protect themselves, their patients and to stop the virus from spreading!

## WHO NEEDS THE FLU JAB?

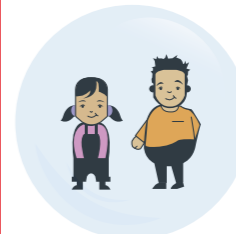


The vaccine is available **FREE** to the following people:

- all pregnant women
- anyone aged 65 years or over
- anyone who has a long term health problem

This includes people who have:

- diabetes
- a chest problem or breathing difficulties (such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema)
- a heart problem
- kidney disease or liver disease
- a neurological condition (such as Parkinson's or motor neurone disease)
- a low immune system due to disease (such as cystic fibrosis or Crohn's disease) or treatment (such as cancer treatment).
- had a stroke
- a problem with the spleen (such as sickle cell disease) or if the spleen has been removed



Children who have one of the conditions listed above or have previously been admitted to hospital with serious chest or breathing problems should also have the vaccine.



You should also have the vaccine if you:

- live in a residential or nursing home
- are the main carer of an older or disabled person



North east GP, Dr Mike Guy

# ASK the DOC

## YOUR FLU QUESTIONS ANSWERED!

health conditions have become seriously ill from flu and required hospital treatment.

### Q. Does the flu virus spread easily?

**A.** Yes. Flu is highly infectious and spreads very easily from person to person mainly through coughs and sneezes. It also spreads if someone with the virus touches surfaces such as door handles with unwashed hands. That's why it's so important to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, put the tissue in the bin straight away and then wash your hands. In short - **CATCH IT BIN IT, KILL IT.**

### Q. Why do carers need the jab?

**A.** If you care for an elderly or disabled person then you need the flu jab to make sure you don't pass the virus onto those you look after who are more vulnerable. Flu symptoms take around two days to develop, so you may have the virus without even realising it. Getting the jab is the best way to protect yourself and others.

### Q. Is the strain of flu we are likely to face this winter the same as last year?

**A.** It is similar but not exactly the same. We vaccinate for a slightly

different, new strain of flu every year. This year, the seasonal flu vaccine will protect against three strains of flu, including the H1N1 strain which caused the swine flu pandemic in 2009 and which continues to attack younger people.

### Q. What do you say to those people who are in at risk groups and claim that they 'never catch flu' and 'don't need the jab'?

**A.** Firstly, I would remind them that the flu virus changes every year and the new strains have the potential to affect people in different ways. That's why you need the jab EVERY year.

Take the swine flu pandemic in 2009. Against all expectations, many of the very sick were young adults – not the elderly. The H1N1 virus that caused swine flu will still be circulating this winter which is why this year's flu jab will protect against this particularly vicious strain.

### Q. Finally, what should people do now to get the vaccine?

**A.** Talk to your GP and book a vaccination appointment ASAP!

### Q. How important is the flu jab?

**A.** It's extremely important. Flu is a preventable illness yet it continues to kill people in our region every year. As we approach winter it is crucial that those at risk, including pregnant women, younger people with long term health problems, as well as all those over 65, get the vaccine to protect themselves.

### Q. How dangerous is the flu virus?

**A.** Flu can be very dangerous for those in at risk groups. We're increasingly seeing the flu virus attack younger age groups. In recent years, both pregnant women and younger people under 65 who have long term

## Think you know all there is to know about flu? Are the following statements true or false?

1. The flu vaccine can't give you flu
2. 'Stomach flu' and 'seasonal flu' are the same thing
3. Getting a flu vaccine in December or later is not too late
4. A new flu vaccine is produced each year
5. Washing your hands is the best thing you can do to protect against flu
6. The flu vaccine protects against three strains of flu
7. Flu is typically spread through coughs and/or sneezes
8. Flu is not a serious illness
9. Pregnant women can't have the vaccine
10. You can spread flu to others before you have symptoms

## what's your FLU IQ?



Answers on page 7.

# MYTHBUSTERS

## Flu myths BUSTED! Learn what's untrue about flu...

### Myths about flu and the jab are everywhere but flu can be serious and even fatal, so here are the facts you need to know...

**MYTH** I had the flu jab last year, so I don't need it again

**FACT** - The flu virus changes every year which means that slightly different virus strains circulate from previous years. You will have no immunity to these new strains which is why people at risk need the jab EVERY year.

**MYTH** Flu is a mild illness, I don't need to be vaccinated

**FACT** - For the majority of people, flu is simply unpleasant. But for those people who are at risk, flu is much more serious and they can develop serious complications such as bacterial chest infections, pneumonia and breathing difficulties which can be fatal. Over 600 people in the UK died with flu last year and each winter it contributes to the deaths of around 8,000 people.

**MYTH** The vaccine gives you the flu

**FACT** - There is NO live virus in the flu vaccine and so there is absolutely NO possibility of catching flu from the vaccine!

The vaccine works by tricking your immune system into thinking it has been infected with the flu virus so that it creates antibodies against it. After a week to ten days after having the jab, your body starts making antibodies to fight off what it thinks is a virus in the vaccine. If you are then exposed to flu, your immune system will destroy the virus before it can cause illness.

**MYTH** The side effects of the jab are worse than the flu

**FACT** - Some people may experience mild fever up to 48 hours after having the flu jab as their immune system responds to the vaccine, but this is NOT flu. Most people suffer nothing worse than a slightly sore arm.

**MYTH** I've heard the vaccine doesn't work

**FACT** - Most people who have the jab will not get flu. However, like any vaccine, it does not give 100% protection. The majority of people will be fully protected, some will get milder symptoms but a small number may still get flu.

**MYTH** I can't have the vaccine if I'm pregnant

**FACT** - All pregnant women can have the flu jab. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women and can be given at any stage of pregnancy. The earlier you have the jab the better, as this means you will be protected for the whole winter and it may also give your unborn baby some protection against flu during the first six months of life.

**MYTH** The vaccine is not safe

**FACT** - The flu vaccine is safe and licensed for use in the UK. The current manufacturing process has been used since the 1980s and is tried and tested. Although a new vaccine is produced each year (to cover the new virus strains), the process of manufacture is the same and is safe.



## Flu or cold?

The symptoms of flu are similar to those of the common cold. Here's how to tell the difference!

- Symptoms of a cold appear gradually, are not severe and affect just your nose and throat.
- Symptoms of flu are much more severe, causing fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles. You will not be able to do your usual activities.

## What to do...

If you think you have flu and are in an 'at risk' group, contact your GP as you may need help in fighting off the virus with some antiviral treatment.

If you are normally fit and healthy you should get better from flu without treatment after two to three days of rest. You should also take paracetamol based cold remedies to lower your temperature and drink plenty of fluids.

# Why are we looking down under?

It's always good to know that somebody's watching over you. What you may not know is that 365 days a year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is monitoring all flu viruses which are circulating in all regions of the world - in over 100 countries!



Right now, all eyes are on Australia and New Zealand as they have just had their winter.

## AUSSIE CASES ON INCREASE

The Australian flu season traditionally peaks in August and September and officials have reported an increase in flu cases compared to 2010. One of the main virus strains continues to be H1N1 - the swine flu virus which caused the pandemic in 2009.

**Thousands of Australians have already had their flu jab this year!**



## Did you know?

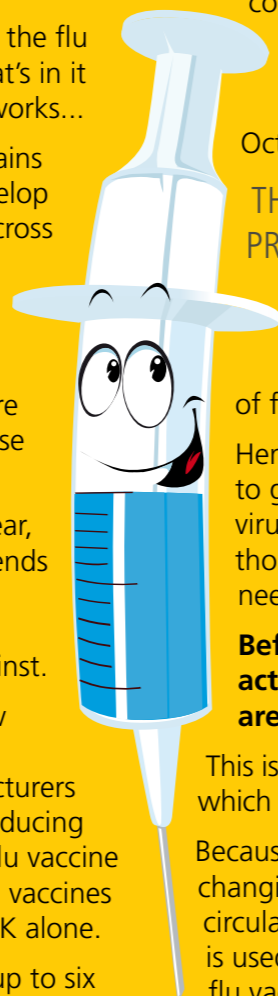
California

Flu viruses are named for the place and the year where they are first identified. The official name of the swine flu virus is A/California/7/2009 (H1N1), because its first documented appearance was in residents of California during 2009.

# ALL ABOUT THE VACCINE

Many people are still confused about how the flu vaccine is made, what's in it and how it actually works...

- Every year, new strains of the flu virus develop and cause illness across the world. This means that a new vaccine is also needed every year to ensure people are protected from these new strains.
- In February each year, the WHO recommends which **three** virus strains the flu jab should protect against.
- As soon as the new virus strains are identified, manufacturers get to work on producing the new seasonal flu vaccine - around 14 million vaccines are made for the UK alone.
- The process takes up to six months with pharmaceutical



companies starting in the spring to ensure delivery in time for our annual vaccination campaign in October.

## THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Manufacturers use hen's eggs to grow and incubate the new strains of flu virus.

Hen's eggs are used in order to grow enough of the live virus to be able to make the thousands of vaccines that are needed around the world.

**Before being made into the actual vaccine, the viruses are first killed and purified.**

This is a tried and tested process which has been used for decades.

Because the flu virus is continually changing and different types circulate each winter, this process is used each year to make a new flu vaccine.

# FLU CASE FILE: JOANNE WALTERS I NEARLY DIED & LOST MY BABY

REAL LIFE STORY



Photo courtesy of Teesside Evening Gazette

**32 year old Joanne Walters from Middlesbrough almost lost her life to flu after contracting the H1N1 strain of the virus whilst heavily pregnant. She was so critically ill that doctors at the James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough battled for over a month to keep her, and her baby, alive.**

Joanne, who was seven months pregnant at the time, was taken to A&E with cold symptoms, back and chest pains and breathing difficulties. Her condition deteriorated rapidly and she was transferred to intensive care. By 8pm the same evening she was on a ventilator and put into a medically induced coma as she struggled to breathe.

Luckily, Joanne pulled through the ordeal and gave birth to a healthy baby boy, Thomas, but her family knows it could have been a very different story.

Joanne said: "I lost a month of my life to flu and came so close to dying and losing my baby - the doctors didn't know how it was going to affect Thomas but they were able to leave him where he was as they tried to save us both.

"I hadn't had the flu vaccine at the time and would strongly urge any pregnant women reading this to get it now. I never thought this could happen to me but it did and I wouldn't want any women to risk going through what me and my family went through that winter."

Joanne's mum Alison added: "It was a terrible ordeal. Scary was not in it. The consultant told us to prepare for the worst - and we did. Pregnant women need to realise that flu is serious - it nearly took both my daughter and my grandson away from me - and it all could have been prevented with this simple vaccination."

**Remember - Pregnant women and young people with long term health conditions are at risk from flu too. Check with your GP to see whether you need the jab!**

## FLU IQ? answers

### 1.True

The flu jab **CANNOT** cause flu illness as there is no live virus in the vaccine.

### 2.False

Seasonal flu is a respiratory (lung) disease, not a stomach disease. The main symptoms of seasonal flu are fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms can occur but are more common in children.

### 3.True

Vaccination begins in October but continues into December, January and beyond. It's best to get the jab as early as possible.

### 4.True

The flu virus is always mutating and becoming a little different which means a new vaccine is needed each year to ensure people are protected from these new strains.

### 5.False

For people who are most at risk from flu, getting the jab is the most important step in protecting themselves. However, we can all practice good hygiene to reduce the spread! Remember to **CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT.**

### 6.True

The flu jab protects against the three main flu strains that the World Health Organisation indicates will cause the most illness. This year, the jab will protect against three strains of the virus, including the H1N1 (swine flu) strain.

### 7.True

The flu virus is highly infectious and spreads easily from person to person mainly through coughs and sneezes. Flu can also spread if you touch an infected surface such as door handles.

### 8.False

Flu can be very serious and sometimes fatal for those people who are at risk. The potential serious nature of flu should not be underestimated.

### 9.False

The jab is available to all pregnant women.

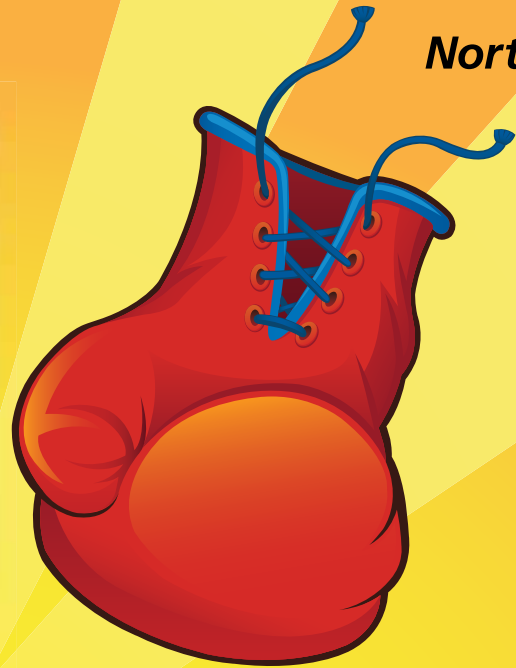
### 10.True

Symptoms take on average two days to develop after you have been infected. This means that you may pass the flu virus onto someone else before you know you are sick.



**There is NO live virus in the vaccine. The jab CANNOT give you the flu!**

# FIGHT THE FLU



## PLEASE DON'T DELAY

MAKE SURE YOU GET PROTECTED TODAY - BOOK A VACCINATION APPOINTMENT

### FLU WORD SEARCH...

While you wait - try and find all of the words from the poem below which are highlighted in bold!

F	L	U	D	I	F	H	F	Z	I	P	U
A	I	Q	C	J	G	N	R	O	L	R	C
B	E	T	N	U	R	S	E	N	J	O	S
H	Q	L	I	X	R	V	E	B	A	T	A
D	F	U	U	J	A	C	F	I	B	E	A
I	A	I	E	V	I	R	U	S	D	C	G
S	N	J	G	A	H	D	U	B	J	T	D
E	N	D	S	C	S	N	E	E	Z	E	O
A	U	O	E	C	P	Y	C	C	K	D	C
S	A	I	N	I	E	S	R	T	E	U	T
E	L	B	V	N	S	T	R	A	I	N	O
F	U	C	D	E	S	O	Z	G	I	O	R
A	R	F	I	N	F	E	C	T	E	D	T

**FLU** can be serious  
 And the **VIRUS** spreads easy  
 But by having the **JAB**  
 You can avoid feeling **QUEASY**  
 Talk to your **DOCTOR**  
 Or your practice **NURSE**  
 Have the **VACCINE** today  
 It's **FREE** and won't cost your purse  
 It's a different flu **STRAIN** every year  
 But the **ANNUAL** flu jab will protect you - it's clear!  
 Remember to cover your mouth when you **SNEEZE**  
 It's the best way to stop the spread of **DISEASE**  
 Most of all make sure you are **PROTECTED**  
 Getting the flu jab means you won't get **INFECTED**



### TELL US YOUR FLU STORY...

Have you or your family been in hospital with flu? Do you always get the flu jab? We're always looking for case studies of local people to help us encourage others who are at risk to get vaccinated - it really is the best way to stay well over winter. Email [askus@northeast.nhs.uk](mailto:askus@northeast.nhs.uk) if you would like to share your story.