

FAQS: Winter vaccinations 2022/23

Seasonal flu and COVID-19 autumn boosters for staff

1. Why is it so important that I receive both vaccines this year?

It's important that you receive the flu vaccination this year to help protect yourself and those around you. Flu is an unpredictable virus that can kill thousands of people during a flu season. There have been very low levels of flu circulating in the last two years due to measures that were in place to reduce COVID-19 infections, such as social distancing and mask-wearing. There is likely to be a resurgence of flu this winter similar to or higher than the levels before the pandemic because people will be mixing more. Flu and COVID-19 can both be life-threatening and spread more easily in winter when we are more likely to be indoors or in crowded spaces.

2. Can I have my flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster in the same appointment?

Yes! It's fine to have them both at the same time or separately. Staff can get both their COVID-19 autumn booster and their flu vaccine on the same day from 29 September to 14 October at Watford Football Club. We encourage you to get your vaccinations as soon as possible. See below for more information.

3. How and when should I get my flu vaccine?

The flu vaccination will be available from 29 September. You can get it:

- Via our roving flu nurses – see [here](#) for schedule
- By booking an appointment in advance. Email: westherts.staffvaccination@nhs.net for appointment availability
- From one of our many peer vaccinators across the Trust
- From WFC at the same time as your COVID-19 booster

The COVID-19 booster will be available at the walk-in vaccination clinic at Watford FC from 26 September to 14 October.

You can drop by anytime during our opening hours. See [here](#) for more information on clinic dates and times.

Although there are opportunities to get both together, you should not delay getting the flu vaccine if it is offered to you first.

4. Will the side effects be worse if I have both vaccines at the same time?

People who receive both vaccines at the same time may be slightly more likely to experience at least one side effect when both vaccines are given together, although

these are typically mild, short-lived reactions. The vaccines are extremely safe and there is no evidence that giving both together is more likely to cause serious side effects.

5. Is the NHS confident the vaccines are safe?

Yes – the MHRA, the official UK regulator authorising licensed use of medicines and vaccines by healthcare professionals, has said these vaccines are safe and highly effective, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

6. Is the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster mandatory for staff?

No, having the COVID-19 or flu vaccine is not compulsory for health and social care staff, but helps to provide important protection for these individuals and those they come into contact with. WHTH will be working hard to ensure all staff can get the COVID and flu vaccines this autumn/winter, and we are confident that most of our staff will choose to protect themselves and those around them by getting the vaccines.

Flu vaccine questions

7. How effective is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is your best protection against the virus. It will not stop all flu viruses but if you do get flu after vaccination, it's likely that if you do still catch the flu the disease will be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been. It takes the immune response about two weeks to fully develop after vaccination.

8. Will I get any side effects from the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines have a good safety record. All adult flu vaccines are given by injection into the muscle of the upper arm.

Most side effects are mild and only last for a day or so, such as:

- slightly raised temperature
- muscle aches
- sore arm where the needle went in – this is more likely to happen with the vaccine for people aged 65 and over

Try these tips to help reduce the discomfort:

- continue to move your arm regularly
- take a painkiller, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen – some people, including those who are pregnant, should not take ibuprofen unless a doctor recommends it.

9. Will the flu jab give me flu?

No. The injected vaccine used for adults does not contain any live viruses, so it cannot cause flu. Some people get a slightly raised temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and you may feel sore at the injection site.

10. Can I have the flu vaccine if I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?

JCVI advice recommends that you should have a flu vaccine if you are eligible. You should have the flu vaccine if you're pregnant to help protect you and your baby. It's safe to have the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy from the first few weeks up to your expected due date. Women who have had the flu vaccine while pregnant also pass some protection on to their babies, which lasts for the first few months of their lives. It's safe for women who are breastfeeding to have the vaccine.

11. Is there anyone that shouldn't get the flu vaccine?

There will be a small number of people where it is advised that you should not have a flu vaccine, for example if you have ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you are allergic to eggs or have a condition that weakens your immune system, you may not be able to have certain types of flu vaccine – check with your vaccinator. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.

12. I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need to have it again?

Yes, because the viruses that cause flu can change every year. This means the flu (and the vaccine) this year may be different from last year. If you had the flu vaccine last year, either because you were and health and social care worker, pregnant or because you're in a vulnerable group, you need to have it again this year.

13. Do I still need to get my flu jab if I've had all of my COVID-19 vaccines?

Yes, the COVID-19 vaccine does not protect you from flu, and vice versa. As you are eligible for both vaccines you should have them both.

14. I've recently had COVID-19, can I still have my flu vaccine?

If you've had COVID-19, it's still safe to have the flu vaccine, however you may wish to reschedule your appointment if you are currently experiencing a high temperature or acute illness on the day of the appointment. It will still be effective at helping to prevent flu.

For advice and information about the flu vaccination, visit www.nhs.uk/flujab

COVID-19 autumn booster vaccination questions

15. Which vaccine will I receive?

We will be using the **Moderna** (Spikevax) vaccine. This new 'bivalent' vaccine protects against both the original strain of the virus **and** the Omicron variant.

16. How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering serious ill health due to COVID-19. With both flu and COVID-19 expected to be circulating this winter, it's important to boost your immunity and help protect yourself and others.

17. Can I still catch COVID-19 after having the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from severe COVID-19 disease. It may take a few days for your body to build up some protection from the booster. Like all medicines, no vaccine gives a 100% guarantee of not

catching the virus – some people may still get COVID-19 despite getting vaccinated but this should be less severe.

18. I've already had COVID-19 and have built up natural immunity. Why do I still need the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine and natural infection stimulate different parts of the immune system, so they are complementary. Both wane over time, and it is not clear how much protection an infection from one variant provides against other strains of COVID-19. Following COVID-19 infection, you will also get significant extra protection from the vaccine although, to reduce side effects, you will need to wait at least 4 weeks after infection before getting vaccinated.

19. Has the COVID-19 booster been given to people like me?

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

Each of the vaccines are tested on tens of thousands of people across the world. They are tested on both men and women, on people from different ethnic backgrounds, and of all age groups.

[Latest data](#) from UKHSA show that six months after receiving a second dose, two doses provide between 60% and 70% protection from needing to be hospitalised for COVID-19. This increases to around 90% protection shortly after having the booster, around 85% at four to six months and remains around 70% six months after the booster.

20. Will there be any side effects from the autumn booster vaccine?

Common side effects are the same for all COVID-19 vaccines used in the UK, and include:

- having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around a day or two following the vaccination
- feeling tired
- headache general aches, or mild flu like symptoms

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better. Although feeling feverish is not uncommon for 2 to 3 days, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate you have COVID-19 or another infection.

Although a fever can occur within a day or 2 of vaccination, if you have any other COVID-19 symptoms or your fever lasts longer, stay at home, and arrange to have a test. Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, you can call NHS 111.

If you had serious side effects after any previous dose you may be advised to avoid or delay further vaccination. You should discuss this with your doctor or specialist.

21. Do the vaccines contain animal products?

The approved COVID-19 vaccines do **not** contain any animal products or egg.

Vaccines only contain ingredients that are essential to make them safe and effective. Any ingredients with potential to cause harm (e.g. allergy) are listed even if present in such small amounts. Read more about COVID-19 vaccine ingredients [here](#).

22. Are there any serious side effects to having the COVID-19 vaccine?

Worldwide, there have been very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after some vaccinations.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger men within several days after vaccination. Most of these people recovered and felt better following rest and simple treatments.

You should seek medical advice urgently if, after vaccination, you experience:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart

23. I've only just had my first or second COVID-19 vaccine, can I have the autumn booster jab?

The JCVI advises that the booster vaccine should be offered **no earlier than three months** after completion of the primary vaccine course.

24. Can I have the booster if I haven't completed the primary vaccination course?

No, you need to finish the first ('primary') course of vaccination. The booster vaccination is available from 3 months (91 days) after your second dose.

25. I haven't yet had the COVID-19 vaccination, can I still get my first jabs at WHTHT?

No, everyone that hasn't already had their first or second COVID-19 vaccination will need to get vaccinated via their GP.

26. I've already had COVID-19, why do I need a booster?

Getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had COVID-19 as it is for those who haven't.

The COVID-19 vaccine provides additional protection, beyond that of natural immunity from previous infection alone, against serious complications of infection. You should also have some protection from the mild symptoms and protection against severe disease is expected to remain high against future variants.

If you have had COVID-19 you will still get extra protection from the vaccine, but you will need to wait 4 weeks before getting vaccinated.

27. Is there anyone who shouldn't have a COVID-19 booster?

There are very few people who should not have a booster.

If you have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine you should discuss this with your doctor.