



Is your child at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from influenza?

Children with the following illnesses and conditions are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill from influenza, and should have the influenza vaccine annually:

- Chronic lung disease (including asthma)
- Heart disease
- Chronic neurological disease or injury (e.g. epilepsy and conditions that affect lung function)
- Immunodeficiency as a result of illness or treatment (such as organ transplant, cancer)
- Liver or kidney failure
- Diabetes
- Severe obesity
- Other serious or chronic illness where influenza poses a serious health risk, following an individual assessment by a doctor (e.g. children with congenital chromosome abnormalities and genetic syndromes)
- Premature children. The risk is highest for children born before week 32 of the pregnancy. Annual vaccination is recommended from six months (chronological age) up to five years.

What is influenza and why can it be serious?

Influenza is an infectious disease caused by the influenza virus, which results in infection in the nose, throat and lungs. Influenza is not the same as a cold. Influenza symptoms often develop rapidly, with high fever, muscle pain, headaches and fatigue. Some children may vomit or have diarrhoea.

The influenza viruses cause epidemics in Norway between October and May every year. Influenza is especially common among children. During an average influenza season, 20-30% of all children will become infected. The vast majority of children cope with influenza well, but children with some illnesses and conditions are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill.

Around 500 children become so seriously ill every year from influenza that they have to be admitted to hospital. Most of these are basically healthy children, but some have illnesses or conditions that put them at greater risk of becoming seriously ill due to influenza. Children in these risk groups are approximately four times more likely to be admitted to hospital with influenza than healthy children.

In Norway, up to 80,000 children between the ages of 0 and 17 belong to the risk groups for severe influenza. The largest group comprises children with asthma or another lung disease. In addition, there are several thousand children with heart disease, diabetes and neurological diseases such as epilepsy.

Children in the risk groups may experience worsening of their original condition, and be prone to additional diseases, such as pneumonia, if they contract a serious influenza infection. Deaths among children due to influenza are rare, but when they do happen, they usually concern children with an illness or condition that makes them particularly vulnerable to serious illness.

Vaccination is the best preventative measure

Influenza vaccination is the easiest and most effective measure to prevent influenza and the serious consequences of the illness. Children with risk conditions should therefore be given the vaccine every autumn.

Benefits of having the influenza vaccine:

- Six out of ten people who have been vaccinated are protected against influenza
- The influenza vaccine reduces the risk of your child being hospitalised or developing serious complications due to influenza.
- The influenza vaccine may relieve influenza symptoms in those who become infected despite having been vaccinated.

Two types of influenza vaccine for children

In Norway, two types of influenza vaccine have been approved for children: a vaccine which is administered by **injection** (approved for all children from six months) and a vaccine which is administered by **nasal spray** (approved for the age group 2-17 years).

The nasal spray vaccine should not be used by children with severe asthma, active breathing difficulties, immunodeficiency or a cleft palate. Neither of the vaccines should be given in the event of known allergy to influenza vaccine.

In the case of children aged 6 months to 9 years who have not been vaccinated or had influenza previously, two doses of influenza vaccine at least four weeks apart are recommended (regardless of vaccine type).

What do the vaccines contain?

The injection vaccine contains pieces of influenza virus, sterile water, various salts and other excipients. The nasal spray vaccine contains live, attenuated influenza viruses that have been altered so that they can only survive for a short period of time in the nasal mucosa and cannot survive elsewhere in the body. It also contains sterile water, salts, sugar and gelatine.

How effective are the vaccines?

The effect depends on the type of influenza virus that causes the infection, how similar the vaccine is to the influenza viruses that are circulating among the population, and which vaccine is used. Medical conditions can also have an impact on the effect. The effect of influenza vaccine varies from year to year, but averages around 60 percent. Some people can therefore contract influenza even if they have been vaccinated, but the vaccine can reduce the severity of the disease and the risk of serious illness.

Are the influenza vaccines safe?

All medicines and vaccines can cause side effects, but not everyone experiences them. Influenza vaccines only very rarely cause serious side effects. They have been in use for many years and, over the past few decades, approximately 500 million doses have been administered annually.

- The pneumococcal vaccine can cause tenderness, redness and swelling around the injection site. The nasal spray vaccine can cause nasal congestion and a runny nose. Both vaccines can cause mild malaise, muscle pain and fever for 1-2 days after administration of the vaccine.
- Allergic reactions and other serious adverse effects are rare. None of the vaccines will give your child influenza. None of the vaccines will give your child influenza.
- Ingen av vaksinene gir barnet influensasykdom.

Where can my child get the vaccine?

Vaccination usually takes place from October to December. As a parent, you will normally need to book an appointment for your child's vaccination. Please check the website of your municipality or GP for information on child vaccination. Children who are in hospital or being treated or followed up by a specialist can receive the vaccine there.

How much does the vaccine cost?

The cost of the vaccine varies. Speak to your GP or check your municipality's website to enquire about the cost.