

Information on influenza vaccination for children born in 2016 and beyond

Why is it important for children of this age to be vaccinated against influenza?

Influenza can pose a significant health problem in children, both those with pre-existing conditions and healthy children. For example, in Spain, **more than two-thirds of children under the age of five who were hospitalized for influenza** between the 2013/2014 and 2019/2020 seasons **were healthy children with no risk factors**, as were more than half of those who required intensive care (ICU). Additionally, in recent years, it is estimated that there have been **three times more annual deaths from influenza in children under five than from meningococcal disease caused by serogroup B**. The Region has decided to expand vaccination to children between 5 and 9 years old, who are also significantly affected by influenza. Prevention is essential, as vaccinating against influenza not only prevents the disease itself, but also its complications—such as pneumonia, which sometimes begins with the flu.

The vaccine is effective. In fact, during the past 2024/2025 season, the vaccine showed **high effectiveness in children**: 60% in preventing cases that required a visit to a primary care centre and 89% in preventing cases that required hospitalization.

Who should be vaccinated against influenza?

Flu vaccination is recommended for all children born in 2016 and later, as long as they are at least 6 months old. Children under 6 months of age cannot be vaccinated—despite being at higher risk—because no flu vaccine is currently authorized for this age group. The only way to protect them is by vaccinating their mothers during pregnancy.

The intranasal vaccine is recommended starting at 24 months of age, so the vaccine will be administered in schools to children attending preschool and up to 4th grade of primary school (inclusive).

Which children can NOT be vaccinated against influenza with the intranasal vaccine?

The intranasal vaccine is contraindicated in children with any of the following conditions:

- **Severe immune system deficiency due to congenital or medical treatment.**
- **Chronic treatment with salicylates (oral or cream).**
- **Asthma symptoms in the 3 days prior to vaccination.**
- **Contacts of immunocompromised patients or those with weakened immune systems** (for example, bone marrow transplant recipients), as they should avoid contact with them for 2 weeks after receiving the vaccine.

In the case of these children, it is especially important that they get vaccinated, since, in addition to protecting themselves, they will also help protect their immunocompromised relative. However, they should receive the intramuscular (injected) vaccine at their health centre or usual vaccination site.

What is the risk of this vaccine?

The live attenuated intranasal flu vaccine is a very safe vaccine that has been used for years in Murcia, Spain, and other countries. In fact, many countries have extensive experience using this vaccine in school-based vaccination campaigns, and this is the third year it has been administered in the Region of Murcia without any issues. In countries like the United States, it has been used for **over 15 years with no safety concerns detected**.

The most common side effect is nasal congestion, although loss of appetite or general discomfort are also quite frequent. If fever or discomfort occurs, paracetamol is the recommended treatment.

Why is influenza vaccination to be carried out in schools?

Accessibility is one of the key aspects of any vaccination program. It is not always easy for families to bring children to health centres or regular vaccination sites during morning hours.

There is extensive experience in neighbouring countries with the use of this vaccine in school-based campaigns, and the Region of Murcia has also reported successful results. The live attenuated intranasal vaccine is a needle-free, painless form of administration, making it ideal for a school-based vaccination program.

Where can I get more information?

At your Health Care Centre, at your usual Vaccination Post or by calling the Vaccination Programme telephone numbers: 968 362249, 968 357409, as well as by e-mail: vacunas@carm.es.

If you have any questions regarding the flu vaccination campaign for children born in 2016 and beyond, please find out more at https://www.murciasalud.es/web/vacunacion/-/vacunacionescolar_gripe.