

# Flu Vaccine

Information for  
people aged 65  
years and over



Public Health  
Advice



Protect yourself.  
Protect others.





# Flu Vaccine Information for people aged 65 years and over.

## 2021-2022

### About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you about the seasonal flu vaccine called Fluvad Tetra for people aged 65 years and over. It tells you about

- what seasonal influenza is
- the difference between a cold, the flu and COVID-19
- who should get this vaccine
- how it works and vaccine safety
- side effects
- when and how to get it
- why it is important to get the vaccine

Please read it carefully

### What is seasonal influenza (flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a very infectious illness caused by the flu virus. The virus infects the airways and the lungs. Flu circulates in the community during the flu season. The flu season usually starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

## Can flu cause serious illness?

**Yes**, the flu can cause serious illness and life-threatening complications including pneumonia, bronchitis and, on rare occasions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

Flu also can make chronic health problems worse.

Some people are more at risk of these serious complications including people aged 65 and over, pregnant women, and people with an underlying health condition such as diabetes and chronic lung disease.

## What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

A cold usually comes on gradually with a sore throat and a blocked or runny nose and its symptoms are usually mild. Flu symptoms start suddenly with fever, muscle aches, headaches and extreme tiredness (fatigue).



## **Why do people aged 65 years and over need the flu vaccine?**

People aged 65 years and over are more at risk of severe illness, hospitalisation or death from flu. The flu vaccine is the best protection against flu. This flu season, the Fluvad Tetra flu vaccine will be offered to those aged 65 years and over. For people aged 65 years and over this is a more effective flu vaccine and this is the first year that it has been available in Ireland.

## **How does the Fluvad Tetra flu vaccine work?**

The flu vaccine changes every year to match the flu viruses that are expected to circulate. That is why you need a flu vaccine every year. This vaccine protects against four strains of the flu virus.

The flu vaccine does not contain any live virus. It cannot give you flu.

The vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies (proteins), that fight infection. If you have had the flu vaccine and you come into contact with the flu virus, the vaccine can stop you from getting sick.

The flu vaccine is the safest way for your body to develop immunity to flu this year.

## How is the flu vaccine given?

The flu vaccine is given as an injection into your upper arm. It will only take a few minutes.

## How many doses of the flu vaccine will I need?

You will need one dose of this vaccine to give you protection that will last throughout this flu season.



## **What is the adjuvant (an ingredient) in this year's flu vaccine and how does it improve immune response in people aged 65 and over?**

The Fludac Tetra flu vaccine contains an adjuvant (ingredient) that will make it more effective.

As we get older our immune system may not respond to vaccines to the same extent. Therefore, the adjuvanted flu vaccine called Fludac Tetra is being offered to adults aged 65 years and over this year.

Adjuvants are substances added to vaccines to help generate a greater, broader and longer immune response. Adjuvants have been added to vaccines for many years to improve their effectiveness.

In Fludac Tetra the adjuvant used is MF59. MF59 is mainly made from squalene oil – a natural oil found in humans, plants and animals.

## Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

**No.** The flu vaccine doesn't protect against COVID-19. It is important to get both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine. This is because Flu and COVID-19 are caused by different viruses.

Flu and COVID-19 can both cause serious illness and if you get them you might need to be admitted to hospital. It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from the symptoms of COVID-19.

If you have had the COVID-19 vaccine you should still get the flu vaccine.

You can get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine if it is offered to you.

## How safe is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is very safe. Flu vaccines have been given for more than 60 years to millions of people worldwide.

The adjuvanted quadrivalent flu vaccine has also been used by the United States as part of their 2020-21 flu vaccination programme. A similar adjuvanted flu vaccine (Fluad) has been used in up to 29 countries for over 20 years.



## What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Most side effects are mild to moderate and short lived.

After Fluad Tetra, very common side effects (affecting more than 1 in 10 people) include:

- injection site pain
- fatigue and
- headache

Common side effects (affecting more than 1 in 100 people) include: bruising, redness or inflammation at the injection site, loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhoea, flu-like symptoms including chills, muscle aches and joint pain.

Some people may get a fever and vomiting after the vaccine.

Side effects were noticed occasionally with a flu vaccine similar to Fluad Tetra. This includes rare but serious side effects such as a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). Your vaccinator is trained to deal with any allergic reactions that might happen. For more information read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet.

## **Who should not get the Fluvad Tetra?**

You should not get the flu vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the flu vaccine or to any of the ingredients in the vaccine (including polysorbate 80). Read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet to see the list of ingredients.

Patients on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab) which are used to treat cancer should not receive any flu vaccine.

Those with severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell) should not receive any flu vaccine.

## **What about people with egg allergy?**

If you have egg allergy, talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist before you get this vaccine.

## **Should I get the flu vaccine if I have a temperature (fever)?**

There are very few reasons why getting the flu vaccine should be delayed.

You may have to delay getting the flu vaccine if you are unwell – with a high temperature of more than 38°C – until you are better.

## Where do I get my flu vaccine?

You can get the flu vaccine from your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist. If you are a healthcare worker, your occupational health department may provide the vaccine at work.

## What will my flu vaccine cost?

The vaccine and the consultation with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist are free.

Please make an appointment with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist now.

## Is it safe to go to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist to get the flu vaccine during COVID-19?

**Yes.** GPs (Doctors) and pharmacists follow HSE COVID-19 guidance to prevent infection and to keep you safe when you visit their premises.



## Pneumococcal vaccine

If you are 65 or older or have a long-term medical condition, you should also ask your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist about the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects against pneumonia. You usually only need to get pneumococcal vaccine once. You can get this vaccine on the same day as the flu vaccine.

For more information see:

[www.hse.ie/flu](http://www.hse.ie/flu)

You will need to read this leaflet and the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet before you get the vaccine. You can find the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet HERE: <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/medicines/human/EPAR/fluad-tetra>

National Immunisation Office

[www.hse.ie/flu](http://www.hse.ie/flu)

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