



# IT STOPS WITH YOU




Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



Department of  
Health & Children  
AN RINN NÍ SLÁINTE AGUS LEANAÍ

Getting the Swine Flu vaccine  
will protect you from Swine Flu  
and will also stop it spreading  
to people around you.

**The HSE is working to offer a Swine Flu Vaccine to everyone in Ireland over the coming months. This leaflet answers common questions about this vaccine and tells you who is being vaccinated, when and where.**



Swine Flu is a new flu virus that has been spreading around the world since April this year. For most of us, it causes mild to moderate flu illness, and most people are able to get better at home after about a week. However, some children, pregnant women, people with long-term illnesses and previously healthy adults have been hit harder by this flu. During October and November the rate of flu illness has been at a record high for Ireland, and many more people are likely to catch this flu over the coming months.

Getting the Swine Flu vaccine is by far the best way to protect against Swine Flu. Also, if you don't get the flu, you can't pass it on to your family, friends, relatives, or someone close to you who is not in full health. So, the more people who get the vaccine, the less flu gets passed around.

The HSE is working to offer a Swine Flu vaccine to everyone in Ireland. This is being done in phases as we receive the limited supplies of this new vaccine, starting with people most at risk from this flu. This programme started in late October and will continue over a period of six to eight months. We have already vaccinated hundreds of thousands of people, and are working to ensure many more get protection from Swine Flu as we go forward through the winter.

### **What groups were offered the vaccine first?**

Ireland has a National Immunisation Advisory Committee and Pandemic Influenza Expert Group, who recommended that the vaccine should be given first to those most at risk of Swine Flu complications.

The first group of people to get Swine Flu vaccine included pregnant women and people aged over 6 months and under 65 with certain long term illnesses. These were vaccinated primarily by their GPs, and also at HSE Clinics nationwide. While we continue to vaccinate this group, we have already moved on to the next priority groups for Swine Flu vaccination. These are children over 6 months up to 18 years, people aged 65 and over and healthcare workers. Since babies under 6 months cannot get the vaccine, we are also giving the vaccine to parents and families of babies under 6 months, to protect the infants from the flu.

Once these priority groups are vaccinated the vaccine will be offered to the rest of the population, during early 2010.

The table below describes the different groups, and tells you when and where they are being vaccinated.

Priority Groups	Where?	When?
Pregnant women – from 14 weeks pregnant to 6 weeks after giving birth and People aged over 6 months and under 65 years who have long-term conditions (see below)	Vaccination by GP or by HSE Vaccination Clinic	Started at the end of October and continues in November and December
Children from 6 months to Under 5 years of age and parents and household contacts of children under 6 months	Vaccination primarily by HSE Clinic – parents will be given a personal invitation by letter	Started in November and continues in December
65 years of age and older	Vaccination primarily by HSE Clinic – people will be sent a personal invitation by letter	Starting in November and continues in December
Healthcare Workers	Vaccination at work in occupational health clinics	Started in November and continues in December
Children 5-18 years of age	Vaccination by HSE School vaccinations teams. Information and consent forms for parents will be sent to schools in advance	Starting 1st week in December and continues in January
General Population	Vaccination by HSE Clinic	Commencing in early 2010 when the groups above are completed

**Risk conditions:** Lung Disease (like Asthma and Cystic Fibrosis), Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, Liver Disease, Neurological Disease (like MS, Cerebral Palsy), Immunosuppression e.g. Cancer treatment (and their household contacts), Haemoglobinopathies (Sickle Cell Disease, Thalassaemia Major), Diabetes and Morbid Obesity.

## Where are the HSE Vaccination Clinics?

Clinics have been set up all over the country, usually in existing HSE health facilities. The HSE also rotates the clinics to different locations to give easier access for people from particular localities. When it is your turn to get your vaccine, you will find details of the clinic locations on [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie), in local and national newspapers, and on Freephone 1800 94 11 00. Giving this important vaccine to the whole population is a massive logistical exercise, which has never been done before in Ireland. As we move through the next few months, vaccinating the various groups, some health services may have to be disrupted to allow for the vaccination programme. We will work to keep this to a minimum.

## How will the next priority groups get their vaccine?

During November and December, the main groups being vaccinated are children and older people. The HSE is writing to parents of children aged 6 months to under 5 years and people aged 65 and over with personal invitations to make appointments at HSE vaccination clinics. The letters will explain that it is now time to make your appointment on [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie) or by phone. People in these groups are asked to please wait for their letter, and not to attend a clinic for a vaccine in the meantime. This is because we do not want people to be inconvenienced by queues at our clinics.

If you book a visit to a HSE clinic online or on the phone, please be aware that even though you book for a specific time slot, there will be up to 30 people in your time slot. Please be patient and take some time to read the information available at the clinic. When they get their letter and make an appointment, they should bring the invitation letter to the clinic with them.





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## **What about school age children?**

School age children will be invited to attend for vaccination via their schools. Vaccinations for these children will be carried out using one of three methods – in their school premises, in a school premises near their own school or by arranging an appointment at a HSE Mass Vaccination Clinic when requested to do so. Parents will be notified in advance and will be sent a consent form and information sheet.

## **What can I expect when I attend a clinic?**

The HSE Swine Flu Vaccine clinics are staffed with healthcare professionals and administration staff. On entering the clinic you will be offered a consent form and information sheet. You should fill in the form and ensure that you read the information provided. You will then be met by an administration assistant who will enter your details on to a computerised record system. Once this is done you will be asked to take a seat in the vaccine administration area while your chart is checked.

The vaccine will be administered by a healthcare professional who will check some clinical details with you – how you are feeling; if you have any known reactions or allergies etc. You will then be vaccinated and you will have to wait for a minimum of 15 minutes in the recovery area being observed to ensure that you have no adverse reaction. The whole process takes around 45-60 minutes. Before you leave the clinic you will receive a vaccine card – this card gives details of which vaccine you have received; the batch number; the date and your client number. You should ensure that you keep this card in a safe place.

## **Does everyone need to get the vaccine?**

We intend to offer the vaccine to everyone in Ireland. If you have had flu since April, you should still get the vaccine, as it may not have been the Pandemic H1N1 2009 or Swine Flu virus. If you have had a confirmed positive lab test for Swine Flu or Pandemic H1N1 2009, you do not need the vaccine.

## **How long does it take the vaccine to work?**

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks, so please ensure that you continue to follow good infection control after being vaccinated. If you cough or sneeze – **Catch It** in a tissue, **Bin It** and **Kill It** by washing your hands with soap and water.

## **Do I need one or two doses of vaccine?**

There are two different makes of vaccine being used in Ireland; Pandemrix (manufactured by GSK) and Celvapan (manufactured by Baxter). The National Immunisation Advisory Committee has confirmed that for the Pandemrix vaccine, one dose of the vaccine will be enough to protect most people from Swine Flu. The only exception to this is children aged under 13 years and people with immunosuppression who will require two doses of this vaccine. People who are immunosuppressed would include people with cancer or on cancer treatment – check with your doctor if you are unsure.

For the Celvapan vaccine, 2 doses of vaccine are required to give full protection from Swine Flu. Both vaccines are considered to be equally effective and have the same safety profile.

Where a second dose of vaccine is needed, it should be given after a gap of at least three weeks or longer. If you need a second dose of vaccine, the HSE will let you know when it is available and invite you to attend to get it.

## **How do the pandemic vaccines work?**

Vaccines work by ‘teaching’ the immune system (the body’s natural defences) how to defend itself against a disease. Both vaccines contain a virus called Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 that is causing the current Swine Flu pandemic. The virus has been inactivated (killed) so that it does not cause any disease.

When a person is given the vaccine, the immune system recognises the inactivated virus as ‘foreign’ and makes antibodies against it. The immune system will then be able to produce antibodies more quickly when it comes across the live virus. The antibodies will then destroy the flu virus and stop you getting the flu.

## **Are the Swine Flu vaccines safe?**

Yes, the two Swine Flu vaccines being used in Ireland, Pandemrix and Celvapan, are both licensed by the Irish Medicines Board and have been given to millions of people across Europe already this year.

Reactions have been as expected and similar to seasonal flu vaccines, which have been used for more than 60 years. Serious side effects or allergic reactions are very rare and the Swine Flu vaccine cannot give you Swine Flu.

### **Is there anyone who can't get the vaccine?**

The vaccine should not be given to children under 6 months of age, and should not be given to anyone who has a temperature over 38°C or 100.4°F. If you have a severe allergy to eggs, you can have the Celvapan vaccine, as the Pandemrix vaccine is made using eggs. If you or your child have any other severe allergies or previously had Guillain Barré Syndrome, you should discuss this with the clinic staff before being vaccinated.

### **Is it safe to get the vaccine if you are pregnant?**

Yes. Women have a reduced immune system during pregnancy and so pregnant women are more at risk from complications or hospitalisation from Swine Flu. The risk of these complications is also higher after 14 weeks of pregnancy. The Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in Ireland, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, the World Health Organisation, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the Irish College of General Practitioners and the Irish Medical Organisation all recommend that pregnant women from 14 weeks pregnant to 6 weeks after giving birth get the vaccine. If you are less than 14 weeks pregnant and have an at-risk medical condition or are a healthcare worker, you should also get the vaccine. Having the vaccine while pregnant will protect the mother, and will protect their baby for up to 6 months after birth. The vaccine is safe for breastfeeding mothers and their babies.





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## What can I expect after vaccination?

The most common side effects being seen are mild and may include soreness, redness or swelling where the injection was given. Headache, fever, aches, a mild rash and tiredness may occur. Some people may have mild sweating and shivering as their immune system responds to the vaccine, but this is not Swine Flu and will pass after a day or so. Severe or life threatening allergic reactions to vaccines are very rare.

## What if I don't feel well after vaccination?

Take paracetamol if you or your child has a fever or any pain where the injection was given. Avoid clothes rubbing against the injection area and drink plenty of fluids. Remember, if you or your child is unwell after getting a vaccine, don't assume the vaccine is the cause – it could be for some other reason, and take medical advice if needed.

## Do I have to pay for the vaccine?

The vaccine and its administration are free of charge for everyone.

## Where can I get more information?

Visit [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie) or Freephone 1800 94 11 00, listen to the HSE radio advertisements and HSE information in national and local newspapers.

## STOP THE FLU FROM SPREADING!

Remember, it's very important that everyone continues to avoid spreading flu around – catching coughs and sneezes in a paper tissue, binning it straightaway and killing it by washing hands well and often. If you or a loved one has flu-like illness, you will find simple guidance on how to recognise the symptoms and how to care for flu at home at [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) or on the 24 Hour HSE Flu Information Line Freephone **1800 94 11 00**.