

# Flu Vaccinations and Chronic Liver Disease

- What flu is
- Why you are at risk
- Where to get a vaccine

**It's FREE because YOU need it**

## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients with chronic liver diseases and explains the importance of having an annual flu vaccine to protect you from getting the influenza virus, commonly known as 'flu'.

## Am I at risk?

Chronic liver diseases fall into many different categories. Patients most at risk are those waiting for a transplant or have cirrhosis. If you think you are eligible for a flu vaccine you can discuss this with your Hepatology/Liver Nurse, Practice Nurse or GP.

## Some Chronic Liver Diseases

|                                      |                        |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Alcoholic                            | Autoimmune Hepatitis   | Benign Tumour                   |
| Budd Chiari                          | Cirrhosis              | Gallstones                      |
| Gilbert's Syndrome                   | Hepatic Encephalopathy | Haemochromatosis                |
| Hepatitis A, B, C, E                 | Liver Cancer           | Non-alcoholic fatty liver       |
| Porphyria                            | Portal Hypertension    | Primary Biliary Cirrhosis (PBC) |
| Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSC) |                        | Wilson's Disease                |

## What is Flu?

Many people think having flu is like having a bad cold, but in reality flu is a nasty respiratory virus which can make you feel very unwell. For those people who have a chronic liver disease getting flu can make your liver problems much worse and can lead to problems with other organs in your body. The risk is much greater than for people who are normally fit and healthy.

Some of these complications can be life threatening. Every year over 11,000 people in England die from complications caused by the flu virus. Many of these deaths could have been prevented by having the flu vaccination.

## Why is this important for you?

If you have had a liver transplant or are waiting for one you are at greater risk of complications from flu.

Having liver disease can limit the types of drugs you can have to help treat the flu virus and any complications. It may mean spending time in hospital and taking a long time to recover from the effects of the treatment and the virus.

Flu can make cirrhosis worse while you are waiting for a liver transplant. Flu can increase the rate of rejection and drug resistance for people who have had liver transplants.

**Preventing flu in the first place is the best option.**

## How can you protect yourself?

The most effective way to protect yourself from flu is to have a Flu Vaccine each winter. The flu vaccination season runs from October to February, but most people get flu in December and January, so the sooner you have the vaccination the sooner you will be protected.

It is important to have the vaccination every year because the virus can change, and the previous year's vaccine may not offer you the right protection against the virus in circulation this year.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. Can flu be treated with antibiotics?

A. No. Flu is a virus and the only way to be really protected is with a flu vaccine.

### Q. Will having the vaccine give me flu?

A. No. The vaccine contains an inactive form of the virus which cannot cause flu. Some people may have a sore arm and mild aches and pains which means the vaccine is working and should only last 48 hours.

### Q. Is the vaccine safe?

A. Yes. The vaccine is known to be very safe and can be given to babies and very elderly people with very few problems or reactions.

## Where can I get a vaccine?

### Having your vaccination at your GP Practice

Everybody who is eligible for a FREE Flu Vaccine can get one at their GP Practice from early October.

You may receive an invitation by letter, telephone call, text message or email or the information may be on the GP Practice website, depending on how your GP Practice communicates with their patients.

Many GP Practices will hold large flu vaccination clinics, and you may not need an appointment for these special clinics. It is best to find out dates and times by calling them or checking on the Practice website.

If you have not heard about getting a flu vaccination by early October it is important that you call your GP Practice to arrange an appointment to have a vaccination.

If somebody voluntarily cares for you, they can also have a flu vaccination, so they don't become ill and have to stop looking after you.

**Remember the earlier you have your vaccination, the better protected you will be.**

### Having your vaccination in a pharmacy

It may be more convenient for you to have your Flu Vaccine at a participating pharmacy. Many pharmacies can offer this service for patients who are eligible for a Flu Vaccine. If you have the vaccination in a pharmacy, they will take your details and let your GP Practice know you have had the vaccination.

## If you need more information:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/)

[www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/)

**The Flu Vaccination is FREE and EFFECTIVE book your appointment today**