

## **Swine flu and the swine flu vaccination**

### **What is swine flu?**

It is a respiratory disease caused by a new strain of influenza virus. The symptoms of swine flu are very similar to those caused by seasonal flu. Swine flu is generally a mild infection that comes on quickly and lasts for about a week. It causes fever, tiredness, cough and sore throat. Other symptoms include headache, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, runny nose, loss of appetite, vomiting or diarrhoea.

However, for those with underlying health conditions or who are pregnant or who are having medical treatment such as chemotherapy, swine flu can be very serious.

### **Why am I being offered the swine flu vaccination?**

The groups of people who are most vulnerable to serious illness as a result of swine flu are being offered the vaccine first. Based on the current evidence (from the UK and elsewhere), the highest rates for severe disease are in:

- people with underlying health conditions; and
- pregnant women.

As with seasonal flu, people who have underlying health conditions (in particular people with respiratory disease) are at an increased risk from the complications of swine flu infection and are more likely to be hospitalised.

If you suffer from a condition that affects your immune system, the people you live with can also get the swine flu vaccination to help to protect you. Please try to encourage the people in your household to contact their GP to discuss getting themselves vaccinated against swine flu.

### **Will my regular seasonal flu jab protect me against swine flu?**

No, because seasonal flu and swine flu are caused by different flu viruses.

### **Will there be any side effects?**

All vaccinations can produce side effects such as soreness and swelling at the site of the injection. This vaccine is not live so cannot cause flu. Some vaccines, including vaccines similar to the swine flu vaccine, can cause flu-like symptoms but they are very much milder than having the flu itself and only last for a day or so.

### **Can the swine flu vaccine be given to people with an egg allergy?**

The GSK vaccine Pandemrix is prepared in hens' eggs (the same as seasonal flu vaccines) and so should not be given to individuals who have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (shock or acute difficulty in breathing) to egg products; they should receive Celvapan.

### **Further Questions**

If you have any further questions relating to having this vaccination you should talk to your GP.