

2009 H1N1 Influenza Vaccine

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents and School Personnel

October 16, 2009

Why should I get myself/child vaccinated against the H1N1 flu?

- So far, younger people have been more likely to be infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu than older people. H1N1 Flu is easily spread, especially at school.
- If you decide not to be immunized or to have your child immunized and you do get the virus, you risk exposing someone who has a chronic disease, who has special health needs, is pregnant, or at high risk for other reasons and could become severely ill.

Do I need both the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine?

- Yes. The seasonal flu vaccine provides protection from our usual winter flu. The H1N1 vaccine provides protection from the flu caused by this single new strain of virus.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect myself/child from H1N1 flu?

- 2009 H1N1 flu virus is very different from current seasonal influenza viruses. Most people will not have protective immunity against it and the seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against H1N1 influenza either.

Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?

- The H1N1 vaccine has been made just like the other seasonal flu vaccines, and is FDA-approved.
- The CDC expects the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine to have a similar safety track record as the seasonal flu vaccine, which has been very good.

Will the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine contain thimerosal?

- The 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines that FDA have licensed are manufactured in several formulations. Some will come in multi-dose vials and will contain thimerosal as a preservative.
- However, some 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines will be available in single-dose units, which will not require the use of thimerosal as a preservative. In addition, the intranasal vaccine (nasal spray) is a live-attenuated version that is produced in single-units and will not contain thimerosal.
- If you would like to receive the preservative free vaccines, please contact your health care provider.

Will the 2009 H1N1 vaccines that are currently recommended contain adjuvants (a substance added to the vaccine to increase the body's immune response to the vaccine)?

- No. According to current federal plans, only unadjuvanted vaccines will be used in the United States during the 2009 flu season. This includes the 2009 H1N1 and seasonal influenza vaccines that will be available for children and adults in both the injectable and nasal spray formulations. None of these influenza vaccines will contain adjuvants.

Who does the CDC recommend should receive the H1N1 vaccine?

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or provide care for children younger than 6 months of age (e.g. parents, siblings, and day care providers)
- Health care & emergency services personnel
- People 6 months through 24 years of age
- People 25 through 64 who have certain medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications

Will there be enough H1N1 vaccine?

- Everyone who wants the vaccine should be able to get it eventually, but not when it's first available.

What are the possible side effects of the H1N1 vaccine?

- **The flu shot:** The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are: soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given; fever (low grade); aches and nausea.

If these symptoms occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days.

- **The nasal spray (also called LAIV or Flu Mist):** The viruses in the nasal-spray vaccine are weakened and do not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. Any symptoms from the nasal spray vaccine are usually mild. Shedding of the vaccine virus is rare, so those who receive the nasal spray vaccine do not need to stay home from school after receiving the vaccine.

In children, side effects from the nasal spray vaccine can include: runny nose, wheezing, headache, vomiting, muscle aches, and fever.

In adults, side effects from the nasal spray vaccine can include: runny nose, headache, sore throat and cough.

- The potential benefits of vaccination in preventing serious illness with the H1N1 influenza will far outweigh the risks.

Should you receive the H1N1 vaccine if you have already experienced flu-like symptoms?

- Yes. The anticipated course of the H1N1 is that it will come in perhaps three six- to eight-week waves, will impact 30 to 40 percent of the U.S. population and could result in long closures of schools and workplaces.
- In general, even if you have already experienced influenza-like illness, you should receive the H1N1 vaccine.
- If you are unsure about whether to take the vaccine, contact your regular health care provider for advice.

What can you do to stay healthy?

- Stay informed- follow the advice from your local health provider, state and local health department and the CDC regarding prevention tips and vaccine information (www.healthalerts.ky.gov or www.flu.gov) or call the Kentucky influenza hotline at: 1 (877)843-7727, 8 a.m.-10 p.m. EST.
- Prevent the spread of influenza from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water and use waterless, alcohol-based hand cleaners.
 - Cover the nose and mouth with a handkerchief or tissue when sneezing or coughing.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
 - Keep children home from school, child care or other social gatherings if they are sick. Children should not return to school or child care until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours.
 - Stay home from work or other public settings if you are sick.
 - Avoid crowded places where people are confined in an indoor space.
 - Get the 2009 H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine as soon as it is available, if recommended by your health care provider

Sources: Kentucky Department for Public Health;

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccine_keyfacts.htm; www.nasn.org; www.healthalerts.ky.gov

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccine_safety_qa.htm;