



# H1N1 Vaccination Frequently Asked Questions

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**October 17, 2009**

Frequently updated information about H1N1 vaccine and related topics

## **Vaccination Overview**

### **Is H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine available?**

Washington began receiving H1N1 vaccine in early October. The first doses are for high-priority groups including health care providers, children, and people with medical conditions that put them at risk. Because production has been slower than expected, supplies are limited. If it is not available now in your area, it will be in the weeks ahead. Eventually, enough H1N1 flu vaccine will be available to immunize all who want to get the vaccine.

Watch for information in your community about where vaccine is available.

## **Who Should Get Vaccinated**

### **Who will get vaccinated first?**

Although there will eventually be enough vaccine for everyone, these initial supplies will be limited at first. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people most likely to become ill and those most threatened by H1N1 be the first to get vaccine. They include:

- Pregnant women.
- People who live with or care for children younger than six months of age.
- Health care and emergency medical services workers.
- Everyone from six months to 24 years of age. Those from 25 to 64 years of age with health conditions that put them at higher risk of complications from the flu.

<b>Who Should Get Vaccinated?</b>	<b>Seasonal Influenza vaccine</b>	<b>2009 H1N1 Vaccine*</b>
<b>Pregnant women</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>People who live with or care for infants less than 6 months of age</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Children 6 months – 18 years of age</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Young adults age 19-24 years old</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>People age 25-64 years who have a medical condition that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Health care workers</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>All people age 50 and over</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>All people who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>Anyone who wants to protect themselves from the flu</b>	<b>X</b>	

\* These people will be vaccinated first: When 2009 H1N1 vaccine is plentiful, vaccinations should include remaining groups.

### **Are there some people who should not receive the H1N1 vaccine?**

People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or to any other substance in the vaccine should not be vaccinated. Let your doctor, pharmacist or vaccine clinic know if you have any severe allergies.

### **If I got vaccinated against the 1976 swine flu, do I need to get an H1N1 vaccine?**

Yes. If you were vaccinated in 1976, you should still get the H1N1 vaccine. The 1976 swine flu virus and the 2009 H1N1 virus are different enough that the 1976 vaccine is unlikely to fully protect you from H1N1.

### **If I had H1N1 (swine flu) this spring, do I need to get vaccinated against H1N1 this fall?**

Yes. People who had swine flu in spring should still get vaccinated this fall or winter.

### **Will H1N1 (swine flu) vaccinations be mandatory?**

No. We encourage people to get the H1N1 vaccine when it is available, but you can decide what is best for you and your family.

## **Seasonal Flu Vaccine and H1N1**

### **Will this year's seasonal vaccine protect me from H1N1 (swine flu)?**

No. This year's seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you against H1N1. It will be important to get both vaccines for best protection against H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccine.

### **Should I get vaccinated against both seasonal flu and H1N1 (swine flu)?**

Yes. We encourage everyone who can get vaccinated to get seasonal flu vaccine every year and to get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. The Centers for Disease Control and prevention is monitoring the seasonal and H1N1 flus very closely and hasn't seen any evidence that being vaccinated for seasonal flu makes a person any more likely to get H1N1. Seasonal flu vaccine has been in short supply in some areas. You may need to check regularly to find out when and where it is available and please be patient. Seasonal flu usually peaks in February and March, so you should have time to get vaccinated.

Some people cannot get vaccinated due to a medical condition or because they are too young. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or clinic about these vaccines for you and your family. More information on seasonal flu is available on our [Seasonal Flu News](#) page.

### **Will I be able to get the seasonal vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine at the same time?**

Yes. You can get most seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccines on the same day, if both are available. However, *there is one exception* - you cannot get two nasal spray vaccines on the same day. A seasonal flu nasal spray vaccine and a H1N1 nasal spray vaccine need to be separated by at least four weeks. Seasonal vaccine is available in many areas now, and if it is available near you, – don't wait until H1N1 vaccine becomes available to get immunized. Both influenza viruses can cause illness, hospitalizations and death this fall and winter.

If you are at risk for severe influenza and are also in a group at risk for pneumococcal pneumonia, ask your health care provider about pneumococcal vaccine to prevent the complications of flu.

## **Where to Get a Vaccine**

### **Where can I get an H1N1 (swine flu) vaccination?**

Many settings will offer H1N1 vaccinations, including doctor's offices, schools, workplaces, pharmacies, and public health agencies. Check these sources for information about vaccination sites near you, but be aware that supplies are limited at this time and you may need to check again in the coming weeks to find out when it is available:

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department (find contact information for local health departments)
- A retail pharmacy

You may also be able to find information in your local newspaper or through television or radio.

## **Cost of Vaccination**

### **How much will it cost to get vaccinated for H1N1?**

There is no charge to the public for the vaccine. However, providers can charge a small administration fee – for example, you may still have to pay your regular co-pay at the doctor's office or pay a small fee at a flu clinic. In many areas, public health clinics will provide the vaccine free of charge for people who have no insurance or who are unable to pay.

## **About the Vaccine**

### **Will two doses of H1N1 vaccine be needed?**

Yes, but only for people under age 10. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of one dose of H1N1 flu vaccine for those 10 years old or older. The less mature immune systems of younger children means that two doses create better protection. For that reason, the FDA approved two doses for children 9 years of age and younger. The FDA continues to test to be sure that the number of doses it recommends for all age groups are effective.

### **If two doses are needed, how long after the first dose must children wait to receive the second dose?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the two doses of H1N1 vaccine be separated by at least 4 weeks. However, the second dose is valid if separated from the first dose by at least 21 days.

## **How long does it take for the vaccine to protect people from H1N1?**

Early studies show that like seasonal flu vaccine, the H1N1 vaccine creates a strong immune response in most healthy adults 8 to 10 days after a single dose.

## **Nasal Spray Vaccine**

### **Is the H1N1 vaccine available in nasal spray form?**

Yes. You can get H1N1 vaccine either as a shot (injection) or as a nasal spray (mist). The nasal spray is safe for healthy people 2 to 49 years of age, but not safe for pregnant women. Talk to your doctor, nurse or clinic about which vaccines are best for you and your family.

The nasal spray is more widely available now, although it will make up only 20 to 25 percent of the final total supply.

### **Who should not get nasal spray vaccine?**

The nasal spray vaccine is not recommended for the following:

- Pregnant women.
- People with medical conditions that place them at high risk for complications from influenza, including those with:
  - Chronic heart disease.
  - Asthma, reactive airways, or other chronic lung disease (Including children 2 through 4 years of age with *possible* reactive airway disease: recurrent wheezing or a wheezing episode within the past 12 months).
  - Diabetes or kidney failure.
  - Illnesses that weaken the immune system or who take medications that can weaken the immune system.
- Children or adolescents receiving aspirin therapy.
- People with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare disorder of the nervous system.
- People with a history of allergy to any of the components of LAIV or to eggs.

Ask your doctor, nurse or clinic if nasal spray vaccine is a safe choice for you and your family.

### **Can I get H1N1 nasal spray vaccine at the same time as seasonal vaccine?**

No, you should not get the seasonal nasal spray vaccine and the H1N1 nasal spray vaccine at the same time. This is because the nasal spray vaccines might not be as effective if given together. You need to separate all nasal spray vaccines or doses by at least 28 days.

However, you can get the H1N1 nasal spray at the same time you get a seasonal flu shot, or the H1N1 flu shot at the same time as the seasonal nasal spray vaccine. Talk to your doctor, nurse or clinic about which vaccines are best for you and your family.

### **How many doses of nasal spray vaccine are required for children?**

All children under 10 will need two doses of H1N1 vaccine (either nasal spray or flu shot).

## **Vaccine Safety**

### **Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?**

The H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine is made by the exact same process, and in the same facilities that are used to make seasonal flu vaccine, which has a very good safety record. Like any medication, vaccines may have side effects. People who get vaccinated against H1N1 will be screened for any reason that they shouldn't be vaccinated, such as egg allergy.

People who get vaccinated against H1N1 will get fact sheets describing the vaccine's risks and benefits, signs of side effects to look for after vaccination and how to report side effects (or adverse events).

### **Are there side effects to the vaccine?**

- The most common side effects are mild, such as soreness, redness, tenderness, or swelling where the shot was given; fainting (mainly adolescents); headache; muscle aches; fever; and nausea. If these problems do occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last one to two days.
- Life-threatening allergic reactions are rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot was given.

### **Is it safe to take the H1N1 vaccine if I am pregnant?**

Yes. The H1N1 shot is safe for pregnant women and does not cause miscarriages. Pregnant women are six times likelier than others to get sick with H1N1, making it more important for them to get vaccinated and to get treated quickly. Pregnant women should not get H1N1 nasal spray vaccine.

### **Will mercury-free vaccines be available?**

Yes. Some mercury-free or thimerosal-free vaccine will be available in Washington.

As a precaution, Washington law limits the amount of mercury allowed in vaccines for pregnant women and children under three, but it allows the Secretary of Health to temporarily suspend the law when there is a shortage of vaccine or during a disease outbreak. Because mercury-free H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine may not always be available, the Secretary recently suspended the law to make sure that those who need and want H1N1 vaccine can get it. For more information about the suspension of the law, [see our press release](#).

### **Will the H1N1 (swine flu) vaccines be monitored for safety?**

Yes. The CDC and FDA (along with state and local health departments, health care providers, and other partners) will watch closely for any signs that the H1N1 vaccine causes unexpected problems and will investigate unusual events quickly.

Side effects (also called adverse events) may not be related to vaccination, but instead may just happen around the same time. Through tracking and investigation we can figure out which side effects are truly caused by vaccination and which are not.

### **What can I do if I have a side effect from a vaccine?**

If you think you or your child may have a side effect from a vaccine, be sure to discuss this with your health care provider and either:

- Ask your health care provider to file a report with the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), or
- File a report yourself with VAERS. Go to <http://vaers.hhs.gov/> and follow instructions for online reporting.