

H1N1 Q&As

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Information about H1N1 (Human Swine Influenza) Vaccine

About the H1N1 Vaccine

What is the vaccine?

There are two H1N1 vaccines – adjuvanted and non-adjuvanted. The adjuvanted vaccine is for the general public and the unadjuvanted vaccine is for pregnant women. Adjuvanted vaccine contains an additive, called an adjuvant, which is an ingredient made of naturally occurring oil, water and vitamin E that boosts the body's immune response and makes the vaccine work better for most people. Adjuvants are also used in other vaccines. The unadjuvanted vaccine does not contain an additive.

Who should get the H1N1 vaccine?

We encourage all Nova Scotians to get vaccinated. Nova Scotia has ordered enough vaccine for every Nova Scotian who wants it.

The vaccine is strongly recommended for anyone at high risk of influenza-related complications and for those who care for them. This includes:

- People younger than 65 with chronic health conditions;
- Pregnant women;
- Healthy children six months to 59 months;
- Health care workers;
- Household contacts and care providers of infants less than six months of age; and,
- People who are immunocompromised.

Does this mean pregnant women and children are more at risk from H1N1?

Yes. Based on our experience with the first wave of H1N1, pregnant women and children under five are more at risk of getting severe disease and complications. That's why it's very important that anyone in these groups is vaccinated.

Who shouldn't get the vaccine?

The H1N1 flu vaccine is not approved for children under six months. As well, the following groups of people should not receive the vaccine:

- People who have had a previous severe allergic reaction to any element of the vaccine;
- People with a hypersensitivity to eggs;
- People with a high fever; and
- People who have previously experienced Guillian-Barré Syndrome within eight weeks of receiving a seasonal flu vaccine.

How many doses will I need?

Adjuvanted:

- Those 10 years of age and older get one dose of adjuvanted vaccine.
- Children six months to nine years of age get two doses, given at least 21 days apart.

Unadjuvanted:

- Pregnant women get one dose of unadjuvanted vaccine.
- If unadjuvanted vaccine is unavailable and H1N1 flu rates are high or increasing in the community, women more than 20 weeks pregnant can get one dose of adjuvanted vaccine.

Can I receive the H1N1 vaccine along with the seasonal flu vaccine?

Yes. Both types of the H1N1 vaccine can be given at the same time as the seasonal flu vaccine. Recent research has shown that both vaccines can be safely given together. Nova Scotia is going to make both vaccines available starting the week of October 26th, 2009. People in high risk groups for seasonal flu will be able to get both vaccines at once. This is more efficient and ensures Nova Scotians are protected from both types of flu. For more information about seasonal flu, visit www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/flu.

What if I've already had H1N1?

If you've had a positive lab test for H1N1, you do not need the vaccine as it's likely you will not get H1N1 again this year.

If you've already been sick with flu-like symptoms but were not tested for H1N1 (nasal swab), you may have had other viruses.

That means you should still get the vaccine to protect yourself from getting sick with H1N1.

Possible Side Effects of the H1N1 Vaccine

Are there possible side effects?

Common side effects include:

- Tenderness, redness, and swelling at the injection site; and
- Fever, fatigue, and muscle aches.

As with any vaccine, more serious reactions may occur, but are rare. People should stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after immunization to be monitored for any allergic reaction.

What can you do if you get a reaction to the vaccine?

- Apply a cold compress on the injection site to reduce discomfort.
- As fever may occur, make sure you have acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home. Follow the instructions that come with the product. You should also talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your medical history before using fever medications.

What if the reaction persists?

- Call your health care provider if you are concerned about a reaction, or call HealthLink 811 to speak to a registered nurse. This phone service is available at any time of the day or night.

Getting the Vaccine

How will the vaccine be given?

The vaccine will be given by a needle into the arm (children under 12 months may receive it in the leg).

When can I get it?

Adjuvanted vaccine will be available the week of October 26, 2009. Unadjuvanted vaccine will be available mid-November.

Where can I get my vaccinations?

Nova Scotians will get their vaccinations in a variety of ways including community clinics, doctor's offices and private agencies (for example, your employer may contact a private agency to come to your workplace). District Health Authorities will be responsible for organizing vaccinations in communities across the province. For more information, contact your local District Health Authority or visit www.gov.ns.ca/h1n1.

Do I have to pay for the vaccine?

No. The vaccine will be free for any Nova Scotian who wants it.

Benefits of the H1N1 Vaccine

Why should I get this vaccine?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself, and those around you, from getting sick with H1N1. The benefit of immunization – the prevention of serious illness and death – far outweighs any risk associated with being immunized.

When I get the vaccine, how long will it take to develop immunity to H1N1?

The vaccine gives some immunity to the current strain of the H1N1 flu virus within 10 days.

Safety of the H1N1 Vaccine

Is this vaccine safe?

Yes. Major research into the safety of any vaccine is done before it is used. Canada has very strict requirements for vaccines approved for use in Canada. Vaccines are safety-tested by the manufacturer and by Health Canada. Health Canada reviews all available test results, including international data, to ensure the vaccine is safe and effective before it is given to Canadians.

Using an additive (adjuvant) in a vaccine is not new. Adjuvants are used in many other vaccines in Canada. The adjuvant used in the H1N1 vaccine, although new in Canada, has already been widely used in Europe in other vaccines and has been evaluated by Health Canada. No safety concerns have been found.

Both the adjuvanted and unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccines have been tested and reviewed before being approved for use.

Why are pregnant women getting a different vaccine?

Unadjuvanted vaccines are preferred for pregnant women because there is less safety data available on adjuvanted vaccine use during pregnancy. If unadjuvanted vaccine is unavailable and H1N1 flu rates are high or increasing in the community, women more than 20 weeks pregnant can get adjuvanted vaccine.

What if I want unadjuvanted vaccine but I'm not pregnant?

Nova Scotia has only purchased enough unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women. All other Nova Scotians, including children, should receive adjuvanted vaccine. Research has shown that the adjuvanted vaccine delivers a better immune response and will better protect you from the H1N1 virus.

What about the mercury in the vaccine?

The amount of mercury (thimerosal) used in the vaccine is very small and has not been shown to cause any harm. The vaccine (both adjuvanted and unadjuvanted) is safe for adults, pregnant women and children.

