



H1N1 Influenza - Frequently Asked Questions

Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?

Health Canada has authorized the H1N1 vaccine. This means that the vaccine has proven to be both safe and effective.

Canada employs the most advanced science available in the world to help ensure the safety and effectiveness of vaccines used in our country. It has carefully evaluated the results of vaccine testing carried out in Canada and abroad.

How can I get the H1N1 influenza vaccine?

The H1N1 Pandemic Vaccine will be available through public health mass immunization clinics which will begin the end of October. It will not be available through physician offices. Details on these clinics will be provided by the regional health authorities. Watch your local media for details. Remember to bring your MCP card when you go to the clinic.

When will the H1N1 vaccine be available?

Consistent with all other jurisdictions, we will be receiving the vaccine in stages. On October 26 we will have our first supply of 28,000 doses distributed throughout the province to begin immunizations on a limited basis. As we receive more vaccine, we will expand the scope of the immunization program.

You should pay attention to your local media for information on mass immunization clinics.

Will the H1N1 vaccine be free?

When available, the H1N1 vaccine will be free to all residents.

Do I have to get the H1N1 vaccine?

No, the vaccine is not mandatory. It is up to each individual, however it is recommended that everyone avail of the vaccine as it is the best protection against H1N1 influenza, especially those who are at high-risk.

How many doses will I need?

All Canadians ten years of age and older will receive one dose of adjuvanted vaccine. Children from six months to nine years of age should receive the adjuvanted vaccine in two half-doses, administered at least 21 days apart.

Who will be first to get the H1N1 vaccine?

Keeping in mind that we have ordered enough vaccine for every resident who wants to be immunized, our basic approach will be to ensure those who need it most get it early. Those who will benefit most from the vaccine and those who care for them include:

- Individuals under 65 with chronic health conditions;
- Individuals living in remote and isolated settings or communities;
- Children six months up to five years of age;
- Health care workers involved in pandemic response or the delivery of essential health care services;
- Pregnant women; and
- Household contacts and caregivers of persons at high risk who cannot be immunized or may not respond to vaccines and populations otherwise identified as high risk.

Should children under six months of age have the H1N1 vaccine?

No. The H1N1 flu vaccine is not approved for children under six months of age, however in order to ensure they are protected, household contacts should receive the vaccine.

Is there anyone else who should not have the H1N1 vaccine?

The following people should discuss their risk with their health care provider before receiving vaccination:

- People who have had a previous anaphylactic (severe allergic reaction) to any element of the vaccine;
- People with a hypersensitivity to eggs (e.g. hives, swelling of mouth and/or throat, breathing difficulty);
- People experiencing a high fever;
- People who have previously experienced Guillan-Barré Syndrome within eight weeks of receiving a seasonal flu vaccine; and
- Anyone who was hospitalized with ORS (Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome) after receiving a previous vaccine.

What is the difference between the seasonal flu shot and the H1N1 vaccine?

The H1N1 vaccine will protect you against the H1N1 pandemic flu virus. The regular seasonal flu shot will protect you against the strains of seasonal influenza that may also be circulating this flu season.

Can I still get the seasonal flu shot?

This year, the seasonal influenza vaccine is currently recommended for those most at risk. This includes:

- Everyone age 65 and over
- All residents of long term care homes
- Anyone with a severe chronic health condition that would put them at risk for complications from seasonal influenza

All others who have generally received the seasonal flu shot will be recommended to have the vaccination later in the fall, after they have received their H1N1 influenza vaccine.

What is an adjuvant?

The H1N1 vaccine in Canada is an adjuvanted vaccine which means it includes a substance which provides a more rapid and increased immune response to the vaccine. The adjuvant in Canada's H1N1 vaccine is made up of natural ingredients such as water, oil and vitamin E.

Who should have an unadjuvanted vaccine and why?

Women who are pregnant are recommended to receive one dose of a vaccine that is unadjuvanted. The supply of unadjuvanted vaccines will be made available to all jurisdictions for pregnant women as soon as it is available in early November.

The recommendation for pregnant women was made based on the fact that there is less data available on how pregnant women respond to adjuvanted vaccines and so we want to be very cautious. It does not mean there are any safety issues with the adjuvanted vaccine. If there are high levels of pandemic influenza in the community, women more than 20 weeks pregnant may be offered the adjuvanted vaccine to reduce their risk of disease.

What is the difference between antivirals and vaccines?

Vaccines prevent influenza by building immunity in the body while antivirals treat the influenza disease once someone becomes sick.

Antivirals can reduce influenza symptoms and shorten the length of illness, and reduce the serious complications of influenza if taken within 48 hours of getting sick.

Antivirals do not provide immunity against the virus and should not be confused with the H1N1 vaccine. Vaccines are tailored to a specific virus and increase a person's immunity to that particular virus.

How can I protect myself from H1N1?

The best way to prevent the spread of the flu virus is:

CLEAN: Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

COVER: Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your arm

CONTAIN: Contain your illness by staying home if you are sick

Choose: to be immunized with the H1N1 vaccine

What should I do if I get sick?

If you have mild influenza-like symptoms, but are otherwise healthy, stay home to avoid infecting others and treat the symptoms. You can return to normal activities when you have no more symptoms.

If you are pregnant, have underlying health problems or your symptoms get worse, contact your health care provider for advice.