

## Questions and Answers About H1N1 Influenza

Countryside Public Health and the area medical communities are being asked some questions regarding H1N1 Influenza. Below are the most common questions asked:

### **What are the groups targeted to receive vaccine before the population as a whole is vaccinated?**

- Health care workers and EMS
- Pregnant women
- Caregivers or parents of children under the age of 6 months
- Children aged 6 months through 4 yrs of age.
- Those between 5-18 yrs of age with chronic medical conditions ( asthma, diabetes, heart disease, etc)

As more vaccine arrives, we will be expanding to vaccinate all those 4 to 24 years of age. In time we will have vaccine for anyone who wants to be vaccinated.

### **Why were those groups signaled out? The elderly are told to get the seasonal flu, but they aren't mentioned in these groups.**

As they have studied those with the H1N1 virus they find that, pregnant women, children and those under the age of 24, and those with chronic illness have the greatest chance of becoming hospitalized. The majority of hospitalized from H1N1 are children and pregnant women. Infants under the age of 6 months can't receive vaccine, so they caregivers should have it to protect the little ones.

Healthy adults and Seniors, may have some residual resistance from past flu seasons and on the average, don't seem to get as sick as those that are younger.

### **What will it cost to get the vaccine?**

The vaccine is owned by the US government, so there will be no cost for the vaccine, there may, however, be a cost for administering the vaccine. The vaccinators will be able to bill third party payers such as private health insurances, Medicaid and Medicare. There will be no out pocket charge to the person being vaccinated. For those who are uninsured or insurance does not cover this vaccine you may call your local Countryside office.

### **If I was sick with the flu already this fall do I need to get the H1N1 vaccine?**

If you have had an **influenza like illness** in the past 6 months, it is recommended that you should *still* receive the vaccine. The test performed in the clinics only points toward the *likelihood that you may* have had H1N1 not a confirmed diagnosis. Tests that actually confirmed H1N1 virus were only done for those hospitalized.

**How safe is this H1N1 vaccine? I've heard all sorts of things, "It is made in China, It has other chemicals in it that can cause problems, It is not tested ... Would you take the vaccine or have your children take it?"**

There is much mis-information on the internet regarding the H1N1 vaccine.

- First of all, this vaccine is produced the same as seasonal flu vaccine and must pass inspection by the FDA. In fact if we had identified this virus earlier, it most likely would have been included in the seasonal flu vaccine. Since it wasn't known until last spring, we have to add another vaccination to protect against it.
- Thimerosal is a preservative that is in the flu vaccine. Some are concerned that it may cause problems for young children. This has never been proven in any study. There will be H1N1 injectable vaccine available for young children that are thimerosal free. Healthy children over the age of 2 may receive the nasal mist. There is no thimerosal in that product.
- The other concern you had was that it is a new vaccine and not tested. This vaccine has undergone the same testing as seasonal flu and more. The risks or side effects from the H1N1 vaccine are the same as seasonal flu vaccine.

For accurate information, visit the CDC or MDH web-site and not social sites (like Twitter, Facebook, chat rooms, etc.)

**Can you get sick from the flu shot or flu mist?**

The injection is different from the flu mist. The injected form of vaccination contains dead virus. No one can become ill from the shot, but remember that it will not be effective for 7-10 days, so you may have been infected with the virus before you received the vaccine. Some people do feel a bit feverish or have a sore arm, which is simply their immune system recognizing the virus and mustering antibodies to attack it if you should come in contact with the live virus in the future. This is the same for any injectable vaccine.

The nasal spray or FluMist is called the live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV). In this form, the virus has been changed so it is less virulent. It can only live in your nose and upper airways, not in your lungs, like normal influenza viruses. You can't get the flu, but again you may have a scratchy throat, runny nose for a day or two as your body develops the antibodies it needs to fight off the real influenza virus.

**Is the nasal spray as good as the shot? Do they both protect as well? Could you get sick from someone that had the flu mist if it is a live virus?**

Studies show that it is at least as effective as the injection and children have shown to get very good protection from this type of flu vaccine.

Remember that the vaccine in the flu mist is a weakened virus that doesn't contain a viral dose big enough to cause disease. Also, once the virus gets to the lower respiratory tract the warmer temperatures kill it. Only those with a severe weakened immune system could be at risk.

**Who can receive the flu mist?**

Healthy non-pregnant people 2 through 49 years of age without any chronic health conditions are eligible for LAIV. This includes household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age, health care workers, and contacts of persons who have chronic health conditions.

Those that have received the seasonal flu mist, Varicella vaccine or MMR vaccine must wait 4 weeks before receiving the H1N1 flu mist.

**Beside the flu vaccinations, what else should we do to protect ourselves?**

Wash your hands frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing and before you eat. Cover your cough with a tissue and if you do not have a tissue use the sleeve of your arm.

Stay home when you are ill. Do not leave home to return to work or school or go out into the community until you have been fever free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours and other symptoms have subsided.

If you have other questions, contact Countryside Public Health at [nurse@countyside.co.swift.mn.us](mailto:nurse@countyside.co.swift.mn.us) or 1-800-657-3291.