



## Frequently Asked Questions about Flu Vaccines

(October 14, 2009)

### What flu vaccines are available?

There are two versions of both the seasonal vaccine and the H1N1 vaccines. There is both an inactivated (killed) **seasonal** flu vaccine given as an injection (the flu shot), as well as a live attenuated **seasonal** flu vaccine given as an intranasal spray (flu nasal spray). There is an inactivated (killed) **H1N1** flu vaccine given as an injection (shot), as well as a live attenuated **H1N1** flu vaccine given as an intranasal spray.

### Who should receive the seasonal flu vaccine?

The **seasonal** flu vaccine is recommended for:

- All children aged 6 months--18 years
- Persons aged 50 years and older
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- Persons who have chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, cognitive, neurologic/neuromuscular, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus);
- Persons who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus)
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Health-care personnel
- Household contacts and caregivers of children aged <5 years and adults aged 50 years and older
- Household contacts and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.

### Who should receive the H1N1 flu vaccine?

At this time the **H1N1** vaccine is recommended for:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza (chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, cognitive, neurologic/neuromuscular, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus); persons who have immunosuppression

**Are there differences between who can receive the flu shot and who can receive the flu nasal spray?**

**Yes.** The flu shot (both seasonal and H1N1 vaccines) can be received by anyone age 6 months or older.

The flu nasal spray vaccine should only be received by healthy individuals who are between 2 and 49 years of age and who are **not pregnant**, do not have asthma, and not under 19 years of age and on chronic aspirin therapy. It should also not be given to children aged 2-4 yrs with wheezing in the past year. In addition, individuals who have contact with severely compromised bone marrow transplant recipients should not have contact with these patients for 7 days after they have received the flu nasal spray vaccine.

**Are there any individuals who should not receive the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines?**

**Yes.** Patients who have had a severe allergic reaction to a prior flu vaccination or have a severe egg allergy (they cannot eat eggs because of an allergic reaction) should not receive any of the four vaccines – neither the seasonal and H1N1 flu shots nor the seasonal and H1N1 flu nasal spray vaccines.

In addition, patients who have had Guillain-Barre syndrome in the six weeks after they received a flu vaccination should discuss whether to receive the immunization with their physician

**How many doses of the flu vaccine should someone receive?**

Adolescents and adults only require one dose of the seasonal vaccine and one dose of the H1N1 vaccine

Children who are 6 months to 8 years of age should receive two doses of the seasonal flu vaccine 4 weeks apart the first year that receive that vaccine. They only need one dose of the seasonal flu vaccine in following years.

All children 9 years of age or under should receive two doses of the H1N1 flu vaccine

**Can a child receive either the flu shot or the flu nasal spray vaccines?**

**Yes.** For both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines, children could receive one dose as a flu shot and one dose as the flu nasal spray, or two flu shots, or two flu nasal spray vaccinatedoses.

**What flu vaccines should someone who is 65 receive?**

All individuals over 50 years of age should receive the seasonal flu shot. Right now the H1N1 vaccine is not recommended for individuals 65 or older as they have been at low risk of getting sick due to the H1N1 flu.

**Should a pregnant woman receive the flu vaccine?**

**Yes.** Pregnant women are at higher risk of complications than the general public for complications from both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu, and they should receive both the seasonal and H1N1 flu shots. The flu nasal spray vaccines have not been tested for safety during pregnancy and they should not be used for pregnant women.

**Can someone receive both the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines at the same time?**

**Yes.** The seasonal and H1N1 flu shots can be given on the same day, but need to be given at different sites (e.g., one shot in left arm and one in right arm).

In addition, healthy individuals between 2 and 49 years of age who are not pregnant and do not have asthma (or wheezing within the last year if they are between 2 and 4 years of age), could receive one dose given as a flu shot and one dose as a nasal spray.

However, it is not recommended for individuals to receive the seasonal and H1N1 nasal spray vaccines simultaneously. They should be given four weeks apart.

**Are there preservative-free versions of the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines?**

**Yes.** The preservative thimerosal used in the influenza vaccines is not known to be harmful to pregnant women, children or fetuses. However, there are preservative-free versions of each of the flu shots. The flu nasal spray vaccines do not contain thimerosal.

**What is the concern about Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare syndrome of ascending paralysis that can occur after someone is exposed to a number of different infectious illnesses. In general, there is about one to two cases per 100,000 persons each year. In 1976, there was a slight increase in the number of Guillain-Barré syndrome cases noted in individuals who received a swine influenza vaccine. This was approximately one additional case per 100,000 persons. In no other year since then has there been a substantial increase in the number of Guillain-Barré syndrome cases linked to the flu vaccine.

However, a recent study from France found that the risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome after having influenza is four-to seven-fold greater than that for the general population. Consequently, the risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome is significantly greater for individuals who become sick with the flu than for those who receive the flu vaccine.