

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **H1N1 BASICS:**

#### **What is H1N1 flu? (swine flu)**

H1N1 is a new flu virus.

#### **Why is everyone so concerned about H1N1?**

As a new virus, your body has not been exposed to it before, so it is much more likely to make you sick.

#### **Why is it called “swine” flu?**

When the virus first appeared, it was thought to be very similar to another flu virus that circulates among pigs.

#### **How is H1N1 (swine flu) spread?**

It spreads when someone with the H1N1 flu virus coughs or sneezes. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.

#### **How long can a sick person spread the virus?**

Anywhere from one to seven days, sometimes longer.

#### **What are the symptoms of H1N1?**

Fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and body aches.

#### **How do I protect myself from getting sick with H1N1?**

There is a vaccine to protect against H1N1, but it is in extremely limited supply in Connecticut and across the nation at this time. The best way to protect yourself *without* the vaccine is to:

- Wash your hands often with warm, soapy water.
- If you don't have access to soap and water, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers to clean your hands regularly (e.g. Purell).
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm or a tissue. If you use a tissue, then throw the used tissue away
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick.
- Avoid others who might be sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.

#### **My husband has been diagnosed with the flu. That means I'm exposed, too. How long after exposure can I expect to see symptoms?**

According to the CDC, the estimated incubation period (the time between infection and appearance of symptoms) is unknown and could range from 1-7 days, and more likely 1-4 days.

## **H1N1 BASICS (continued):**

### **I'm sick. Now what?**

Stay home. You may go back to work or school after you have been fever-free for 24 hours WITHOUT taking a fever reducing medication, such as Tylenol.

### **Can I get swine flu (H1N1) virus from eating pork? Bacon?**

No. The H1N1 virus is not spread through food.

### **What's the difference between H1N1 and seasonal flu?**

Seasonal flu viruses change from year to year, but they are closely related to each other. People who have had prior flu infections usually have some immunity to seasonal flu viruses. The 2009 H1N1 flu virus is a new virus strain. It is very different from seasonal flu viruses. Most people have little or no immunity to 2009 H1N1 flu.

## **H1N1 VACCINE:**

### **When is the H1N1 vaccine going to be available?**

Delivery to Connecticut has begun, but in extremely limited quantities.

### **Where can I get the vaccine?**

Please contact your primary care provider to ask if they will be getting the H1N1 vaccine.

If they are not, please contact your local health department or Mass Vaccination Area. Please know that clinics are currently limited to specific target groups.

### **How long after receiving the vaccine does it work?**

Most flu vaccines allow full immunity within 10 days to two weeks, and last for four to six months.

**Why is there a need to target some groups over others?** Some people are more likely to get H1N1 and are at higher risk for complications from this flu strain. As vaccine becomes available locally, it is recommended that identified high-risk groups receive the vaccine before others.

### **The highest risk groups are:**

- Pregnant women
- Children between the ages of 6 months and 4 years
- Caregivers of children aged six months or younger
- Healthcare/EMS workers who provide direct patient care
- Children 5-18 years with chronic medical conditions

However, even in a small state like Connecticut, the need for the H1N1 vaccine varies. If a Mass Vaccination Area (or healthcare provider) has not yet had the opportunity to fulfill the needs of the highest risk priority groups, such as pregnant women or children ages 6 months-4 years, **providers will continue to vaccinate only the highest risk groups in their communities until those needs are met**, then move on to the expanded priority guidelines. Please contact your MVA (or health care provider) for further information who they are currently vaccinating against H1N1.

- **In Connecticut at this time, the intranasal vaccine is restricted to the following priority populations:**
  - Healthy children aged 24 months (2 years) through 18 years
  - Healthy household contacts and caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age
  - Healthy healthcare workers and Emergency Medical Services personnel who have direct contact with patients or infectious material. The supply of vaccine is not yet sufficient to offer vaccine to all health care workers who have direct patient care contact. *Priority will be given to health care workers who have direct patient care contact with children.*

## **H1N1 VACCINE (continued):**

- **Also right now in Connecticut, use of the injectable H1N1 vaccine is restricted for the following priority populations:**
  - Pregnant women
  - Household contacts and caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age
  - All children aged 6 months through 83 months (age 6 months through 6 years)
  - Children age 7 through 18 years with high risk medical conditions
  - Healthcare workers and Emergency Medical Services personnel who have direct contact with patients or infectious material. The supply of vaccine is not yet sufficient to offer vaccine to all health care workers who have direct patient care contact. *Priority will be given to health care workers who have direct patient care contact with children.*

### **How many shots will I need to get for the H1N1 vaccine for adults? What about my kids?**

For anyone aged 10 years and over, one shot is all it takes. Anyone under age 10 will need to get two (2) shots. For children requiring two (2) shots, you must wait 28-days between the shots.

### **What is in the H1N1 vaccine?**

The H1N1 vaccine will protect you from the H1N1 flu, but not the seasonal flu. This vaccine will be made using the same processes and facilities that are used to make the currently licensed seasonal influenza vaccines. This process has an excellent safety record over many years.

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

It is expected to be as safe as the seasonal flu vaccine, which has a very good safety track record. If you have further questions on the vaccine's safety, please discuss them with your primary care physician.

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

People who have a severe (life-threatening) allergy to chicken eggs or to any other substance in the vaccine should not be vaccinated. If you have an egg allergy, please check with your health care provider before receiving EITHER or BOTH the H1N1 vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine

### **I'm over 65. My doctor always tells me to get my flu shot. How come I'm not in a "priority" group for H1N1?**

Current studies indicate that people over age 65 are less likely to get the H1N1 flu virus than younger people. As more vaccine is made, it will become available to those who are not in identified priority groups.

### **I'm healthy and not in a priority group. When can I expect to be vaccinated against H1N1?**

Once the demand for vaccine for the priority risk groups have been met at the local level, public health officials expect to make available vaccine to healthy individuals aged 25 through 64 years and older. It is unclear when, exactly, that will take place, but the decision is based on availability of the H1N1 vaccine.

## **H1N1 VACCINE (continued):**

### **What's the difference between the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine?**

H1N1 vaccines are produced just like seasonal flu vaccines, and are expected to be just as effective as seasonal flu vaccines. The H1N1 vaccine will only protect you from the H1N1 flu and will not protect you from the seasonal flu. The seasonal flu vaccine will only protect you from the seasonal flu and not the H1N1 flu. To protect yourself from both viruses, you should get both vaccines when they become available.

### **How much should I be paying in order to receive the H1N1 vaccination?**

There is *no cost* for the vaccine itself – it's being provided free-of-charge by the federal government; however, **private health care providers** may charge an administrative fee to give you the vaccine, which is covered by most medical insurance plans.

*There should be no charge whatsoever should you choose to receive an H1N1 vaccination at a public clinic.*

### **Can the seasonal vaccine and H1N1 vaccine be given at the same time?**

The H1N1 flu vaccine and seasonal flu vaccine can be given at the same time as long as they are not both the nasal vaccine. If they are both nasal vaccine, the recommended interval between the H1N1 and seasonal vaccines is one month.

### **I don't have a regular doctor. Can I still get the vaccine?**

1. Public clinics are currently limited to high-risk priority groups.
2. Please check back with this hotline to see if any have been scheduled.

### **If I had H1N1 influenza in the spring, will I need to be vaccinated?**

Please check with your healthcare provider.

### **Does the seasonal flu vaccine protect against H1N1?**

No.

### **In 1976, I was vaccinated against the "swine" flu. Do I need to get another vaccination?**

It is unlikely a person vaccinated in 1976 will have any protection against H1N1. For further information, please check with your primary healthcare provider.

### **What do you think? Should I get the H1N1 vaccine?**

That is a decision between you and your primary care physician. Please consult with him or her.

## **H1N1 VACCINE (continued):**

### **I hear about a nasal spray vaccine and flu shots. What is the difference?**

The **nasal spray vaccine** is made from a live, weakened version of the flu virus. It is administered in each nostril. It is approved for healthy people between the ages of 2 and 49.

The **flu shot** is made from a killed version of the flu virus, and is administered by injection into the muscle.

Please check with a healthcare professional to determine whether you should receive the vaccine via nasal spray or shot.

### **If I receive the intranasal H1N1 flu vaccine, will I be exposing others to the live virus if I cough or sneeze? (Or, what safeguards prevent the spray from getting out to the general public).**

No. The live virus used to produce the intranasal H1N1 vaccine is an extremely weak version of the virus. Spread of the virus after receiving the intranasal vaccine will not preclude you from working, and is not a threat to the general population. The weakened virus is strong enough to stimulate the antibodies in the person receiving the vaccine, but not strong enough to infect those around him/her.

### **I have heard about thimerosal. What is it? Is it safe? (USE THIS ANSWER WHEN ASKED ABOUT MERCURY!)**

Thimerosal is a mercury-based preservative that has been used for decades in the United States in vials containing more than one dose of some vaccines to prevent the growth of microorganisms, such as bacteria and fungi, which may contaminate them.

Some people are allergic to thimerosal, and may wish to receive thimerosal-free vaccine, which is also available.

Please check with a healthcare professional for further information.

### **Are there any adjuvants in the H1N1 vaccine?**

Adjuvants are agents that are sometimes added to a vaccine to increase the body's immune response to the vaccine. There are no adjuvants (such as squalene) in either the 2009 H1N1 or seasonal flu vaccine used in the United States.

### **Is the vaccine manufactured in the United States?**

There are 5 different manufacturers for the H1N1 vaccine. Of those 5, some vaccine is manufactured within the United States and some is manufactured outside of the country.

### **Does getting the flu vaccine cause people to get the flu?**

No. However, after getting a flu vaccine, many people experience symptoms such as a runny nose or body aches for a day or so. That means the immune system is responding, and it's a good sign. It means your body is processing the material in the vaccine, but it's not flu.

In addition, it takes up to two weeks for the vaccine to become fully effective after you have received it. People exposed to the flu during that period may become sick.

## **SEASONAL FLU/SEASONAL VACCINE:**

### **What is happening with inventory of seasonal flu vaccine in the nation? In Connecticut?**

- As a nation, 85 million doses of the seasonal flu vaccine have been distributed.
- Connecticut has received and administered nearly 1.3 million doses of seasonal flu vaccine.
- Early vaccination and an increase in demand have nearly exhausted this year's seasonal flu vaccine supply.
- At this time, more people have been vaccinated against seasonal flu in the United States than ever before.
- The CDC expects that approximately 20 million additional doses to be distributed across the United States between now and early January 2010.
- How much of this vaccine will be coming to Connecticut is unknown. That will be determined by the companies that supply the vaccine and how they fill their remaining orders.
- Between 80% and 90% of the seasonal flu vaccine in Connecticut is ordered privately by health care providers.

## H1N1 TESTING:

### Should I get tested for H1N1?

Most people with flu-like symptoms do not need to be tested for the H1N1 virus. Please call your primary care physician if you have more specific questions about H1N1 testing.

## PREGNANT/POST PARTUM WOMEN:

### I have a newborn baby. Will she get antibodies to the H1N1 virus if I breastfeed her?

Breastfeeding allows for the transfer of antibodies from the mother to the baby. If a mother is vaccinated against the H1N1 virus, breastfeeding can provide antibodies against the virus to the baby. You should consult with your pediatrician about getting your child vaccinated against H1N1 once she is 6 months old.

### I'm pregnant and/or breastfeeding, should I receive the vaccine?

If you are pregnant it is recommended that you get the flu shot (not nasal spray vaccine). If you are post partum and/or breastfeeding, you can receive either the flu shot or the nasal spray vaccine. You should consult with your physician.

### Websites with additional information

[H1N1 Influenza \(Swine Flu\) Information](#)

[American Red Cross: Caring for Others During Pandemic Flu](#)

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

[http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general\\_info.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm)

Please see below for contact information for triaging calls. ***Do NOT give out extensions of departments to the caller. This is for call center staff only.***

Types of Calls	Department	Extension/Website
▪ Location of H1N1 Flu Clinics	Mass Dispensing Area Lead Health Departments	www.ct.gov/dph/mda
▪ Calls from other state agencies ▪ Calls from legislators	Government Liaison Office	X7284
▪ Calls from the media	Communications	X7270