



## H1N1: COPD patients should receive the vaccine: YES, YES, YES

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Is the vaccine safe? Should I get the vaccine? Where can I get the vaccine? Am I in one of the priority groups? These are just some of the questions you may be asking.

Who should you trust for getting information? There are doctors, government agencies, patient organizations and researchers who spend almost all of their time studying and thinking about people just like you.

You can start with your own doctor or specialist. You rely on them to prescribe treatment all the time, why would you do differently when it comes to your condition and H1N1?

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends people with chronic health conditions get the H1N1 vaccine. People with the following chronic conditions are more at risk of developing complications from H1N1 infection if they do get sick:

- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Asthma and chronic lung disease like COPD
- Liver disease
- Diabetes
- Serious obesity
- Diseases or treatments that affect the immune systems such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, organ transplants (like those due to Alpha-1)
- Blood disorders
- Neurological disorders
- Medical conditions where people have difficulty swallowing or are at risk of choking
- Children and adolescents' with medical conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin®).
- Pregnant women

But what about people with COPD? You ask. Lung Associations across North America will give you the same advice.

If you would like more information, try the Centre for Disease Control in the US, they say the same, and more (November 6, 2009):

- Total influenza hospitalization rates for laboratory-confirmed flu are climbing and are higher than expected for this time of year.
- The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) based on the 122 Cities Report continues to increase and has been higher for five week now than what is expected at this time of year.

Should I receive the vaccine: YES, YES, YES

## **COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **Will the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines be safe?**

We expect the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine to have a similar safety profile as seasonal flu vaccines, which have a very good safety track record.

**The flu shot:** The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever (low grade)
- Aches
- Nausea

If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days. Almost all people who receive influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it. However, on rare occasions, flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions

### **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.

### **Will the 2009 H1N1 vaccines that are currently recommended contain adjuvants?**

Yes. Vaccines with adjuvants are being studied to determine if they are safe and effective. They are!

### **Will the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine contain thimerosal?**

The 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines contain thimerosal as a preservative. Multi-dose vials of seasonal influenza vaccine also contain thimerosal to prevent potential contamination after the vial is opened.

### **Will the benefits of the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines outweigh the risks?**

Seasonal influenza vaccines are highly effective in preventing influenza disease. The expectation is that a vaccine against 2009 H1N1 influenza would probably work in a similar fashion to the seasonal influenza vaccines. Health Canada and Public Health Authorities believe that the benefits of vaccination with the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine will far outweigh the risks.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza infection and its complications. This is the reason that national health organizations and healthcare providers intensively promote vaccination for seasonal influenza, and the reason why so much work is being done to have a vaccine available in the fall for the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus.

Influenza vaccines do not protect against other viruses that cause respiratory illnesses. Even after you are vaccinated, it is still important to wash your hands well and often, to cover your coughs and sneezes, and to stay home if you are sick.

### **Will there be a possibility of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) cases following the 2009 H1N1 vaccine?**

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare disease in which the body damages its own nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. It is not fully understood why some people develop GBS, but it is believed that stimulation of the body's immune system may play a role in its development. Infection with the bacterium Campylobacter jejuni, which can cause diarrhea, is one of the most common risk factors for GBS. People can also develop GBS after having the flu or other infections (such as cytomegalovirus and Epstein Barr virus). On very rare occasions, they may develop GBS in the days or weeks following receiving a vaccination.

In 1976, there was a small risk of GBS following influenza (swine flu) vaccination (approximately 1 additional case per 100,000 people who received the swine flu vaccine). That number of GBS cases was slightly higher than what is normally seen in the population, whether or not people were vaccinated. Since then, numerous studies have been done to evaluate if other flu vaccines were associated with GBS. In most studies, no association was found, but two studies suggested that approximately 1 additional person out of 1 million vaccinated people may be at risk for GBS associated with the seasonal influenza vaccine. Health Canada and Public Health Authorities will be closely monitoring reports of serious problems following the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccines, including GBS.