

## Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza Vaccine

### What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs) that is caused by a virus. Most cases of influenza occur in the winter months.

### What is pandemic (H1N1) influenza?

Pandemic (H1N1) influenza is caused by a new strain of influenza virus. As a result, people have little or no protection against this virus; therefore, it can spread easily and quickly from person-to-person. More cases of pandemic (H1N1) influenza disease have been seen in people younger than 65 years of age, and especially in persons with chronic medical conditions. There are relatively fewer cases of pandemic (H1N1) influenza disease in persons 65 years of age and older.

### How is pandemic (H1N1) influenza spread?

Pandemic (H1N1) influenza is spread in the same way seasonal influenza spreads. Influenza is spread through the air. The virus gets into the air when someone with the disease coughs, sneezes or even talks. Individuals breathe in the virus and can become sick. Influenza can also be spread by handling objects that have been coughed or sneezed upon.

### What are the symptoms of pandemic (H1N1) influenza?

The symptoms of pandemic (H1N1) influenza are the same as seasonal influenza. The most common symptoms are:

- Sudden onset of cough, and
- Fever (temperature of 38°C/100.4°F or higher)

Other common symptoms may include:

- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Headache and muscle aches
- Loss of appetite
- Sore throat and runny nose

With pandemic (H1N1) influenza, individuals will sometimes have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Most people who get pandemic (H1N1) influenza have mild symptoms and get better within one week without medical treatment. A small number of people develop more severe symptoms and require hospitalization. If you develop more severe symptoms, you need to see a health care provider right away. More severe symptoms are:

- Shortness of breath (rapid or difficulty breathing)
- Chest pain

### How can pandemic (H1N1) influenza disease be prevented?

- **Get the pandemic (H1N1) influenza vaccine.**  
Vaccine is a very effective way of protecting people from becoming sick with influenza.
- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water, or clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains alcohol.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with your arm or a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard tissue.
- **Reduce the spread of germs.** Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose or mouth. Keep common surfaces clean and disinfected.
- **Maintain your health** by taking care of yourself and those in your care. This includes eating a healthy balanced diet, avoiding cigarette smoke, being active and getting enough sleep.
- **Stay home** when you are sick. People who are sick with pandemic (H1N1) influenza can spread the disease for 1 day before getting sick and for about 7 days after getting sick.

### What is Pandemic (H1N1) Vaccine?

Pandemic (H1N1) vaccine protects against the new pandemic (H1N1) 2009 strain of influenza. It does not protect against seasonal influenza. Most people will develop immunity 10-14 days after receiving the pandemic (H1N1) vaccine.

### Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. In Canada, vaccines must undergo laboratory and field-testing. They must pass a rigorous licensing procedure with the federal government before they can be used. Once a vaccine has been approved for use, every lot is tested for safety and quality. The virus used in the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine has been killed. Therefore, a person can not get pandemic (H1N1) influenza disease from the vaccine.

### **Who should get the pandemic (H1N1) vaccine?**

Pandemic (H1N1) vaccine is recommended for all Albertans six months of age or older.

Those who would benefit most from the vaccine include:

- Pregnant women
- Children 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- Persons under 65 years of age with chronic health conditions
- Aboriginal populations
- Health care workers
- Household contacts/care providers of infants less than 6 months of age and persons who are immunocompromised

Others who would benefit from vaccine include:

- Children 5 to 18 years of age
- First responders (police, firefighters)
- Poultry and swine workers
- Adults 19 to 64 years of age
- Adults 65 years of age and older

### **Who should not have the vaccine?**

You should not have the vaccine if:

- You have a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to eggs or chicken.
- You have had an unusually severe reaction to influenza vaccine in the past.

Children less than six months of age can not get the vaccine because influenza vaccine is not licensed for this group.

### **What are the possible side effects to the vaccine?**

Most people have no reactions to the vaccine. Reactions that do occur are typically mild. They usually occur within 6-12 hours after the immunization and commonly disappear within 24-48 hours.

Possible reactions include:

- Redness, mild pain and/or swelling where the needle was given
- Irritability and/or tiredness
- Headache, muscle aches and pains
- Fever and chills

As with any immunization, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur. This includes severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) is another unusual side effect that has been weakly associated with influenza vaccine. GBS is an illness that affects the nerves and results in muscle weakness, abnormal sensation (tingling, numbness) in feet and legs, and temporary loss of movement. In most cases of GBS, there is complete recovery.

The occurrence of GBS is rare, approximately 2 cases per 100,000 persons per year due to all causes. The causes are not fully understood and the association, if any, between influenza immunization and GBS remains uncertain. Studies suggest the risk of GBS in the period following immunization is about 1 more case per million people immunized. If you developed GBS within 8 weeks of receiving influenza vaccine in the past, please talk to the nurse.

### **What should you do if you have a reaction to the vaccine?**

- Apply an ice pack or a cool moist cloth where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling.
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol™) to reduce the pain or if a fever develops. Aspirin® (ASA) is not recommended for children.
- Drink extra fluids (water, fruit juice) if you develop a fever.
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta.

### **Where can I get the pandemic (H1N1) influenza immunization?**

**Drop-in** clinics for pandemic (H1N1) influenza immunization will be held throughout Alberta. Dates and locations of the drop-in clinics will be advertised in the media. Information is also posted online at [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca).

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Health Link Alberta at

- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

Or visit [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) for health information online.