

Questions and Answers 2009 Influenza Immunization Program October, 2009

1. Do I need to get a flu shot?

- All Albertans over six months of age should get their Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 immunization.
- You would also benefit most from a seasonal influenza immunization at this time if you are:
 - i. 65 years of age and older
 - ii. Living in group settings like continuing care and designated assisted living
 - iii. A health care worker
 - iv. An adult or child with chronic medical conditions
 - v. Pregnant
 - vi. A healthy child aged 6 to 23 months old
 - vii. A household contact of someone who is in one of the groups above

2. Where do I find out when and where clinics are near me?

- The best source of information about clinic dates, times and location is on the Alberta Health Services website.
- Albertans can also call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 toll free or in Edmonton at 780-408-5465 and Calgary at 403-943-5465.
- Advertisements are running in newspapers across the province.

3. Who will benefit the most from H1N1 immunization?

- All Albertans need to get an H1N1 immunization
- People who should get their H1N1 immunization as soon as possible include:
 - People with a chronic condition
 - Pregnant women
 - Children six months to less than 5 years of age
 - People living in remote and isolated locations or communities
 - Health care workers

- People who live with people who can be immunized such as newborns and people who are immunocompromised

4. Is the H1N1 vaccine safe? Wasn't it rushed through the approval process?

- The H1N1 vaccine went through the same approval process all influenza vaccines go through. Careful research into the safety of any vaccine, including H1N1, is done prior to its widespread use.
- The requirements for vaccines approved for use in Canada are stringent.
- Every vaccine lot is safety-tested by the manufacturer and by the Biologics and Genetic Therapies Directorate at Health Canada. Health Canada reviews all available test results, including international data, to ensure the vaccine is safe and effective before it is authorized for use in Canada.
- Health Canada only authorizes a vaccine when they are confident it is safe.

5. Why did it take less time to produce and approve the H1N1 Influenza vaccine than other influenza vaccines?

- Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada have been proactively preparing for a potential influenza pandemic for several years.
- A mock vaccine was developed by the manufacturer, in the pre-pandemic period between 2007 to June 2009 using an H5N1 flu virus.
- Health Canada conducted multiple inspections of the vaccine manufacturing facilities, validated the vaccine production process, and reviewed results from both animal and human studies with the mock vaccine.
- The safety and effectiveness of the adjuvant to be used with the vaccine was assessed by Health Canada.
- The remaining requirements necessary to authorize the H1N1 flu vaccine are similar to what is required each year to support the seasonal flu vaccine in Canada.

6. I thought everyone was supposed to get both the seasonal influenza and Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 immunization?

- The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 strain of influenza is the one that is currently circulating and will provide the most benefit to everyone.

- The seasonal influenza immunization is being targeted to the specific groups of people who are at the highest-risk of developing complications due to influenza.

7. Can the H1N1 Influenza vaccine be administered at the same time as the seasonal flu shot and/or other vaccines?

- The H1N1 flu vaccine can be administered along with seasonal influenza immunization and other vaccines. The seasonal and H1N1 flu shots will be given in opposite arms.

8. Should my newborn be immunized?

- No, children under six months of age cannot be immunized. The household contacts of children under six months of age should be immunized with the vaccine recommended for them to prevent the spread of illness.

9. When will immunization clinics be held?

- Seasonal immunization clinics started in mid-October and will run until the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 immunization program started October 26.
- The seasonal influenza immunization may be available at some Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 immunization clinic sites.
- The best source of information about the influenza immunization program and immunization clinic dates and times is the Alberta Health Services website at www.albertahealthservices.ca.

10. What if I miss getting my seasonal influenza immunization?

- Depending the strains of seasonal influenza that are found to be circulating this winter, Alberta Health Services may resume its seasonal influenza immunization program in January.
- The seasonal influenza immunization may be available at some Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 immunization clinic sites.

11. Will I have to pay for the immunization?

- Although Alberta Health Services has identified the targeted populations that will benefit the most from the immunizations, both vaccines are publicly-funded and universally-available.

12. Is there anything else I can do to protect myself from influenza?

- Immunization is the safest and most effective way to protect yourself and your family from influenza.
- Preventing the spread of illness by washing your hands often and properly, coughing into your arm and staying at home when you are sick are also important steps to stay healthy.