



October 2009

Seasonal Flu and H1N1 (Swine Flu)

Information for Caregivers of Children with Special Health Care Needs

What is H1N1 (swine flu)?

- H1N1 (swine flu) is a **new influenza (flu) virus** that was first found in people in April 2009. It has now spread around the world.
- Because H1N1 is a new strain of flu, **very few people have any immunity to it**. This means it can spread quickly and has the potential to cause more complications than the seasonal flu.
- H1N1 is a **respiratory illness** with the same symptoms as seasonal flu. Just like seasonal flu, H1N1 can lead to pneumonia and, in some cases, death.

What groups of children are most at risk of complications if they get the seasonal flu or H1N1?

- **Children and infants who have high-risk medical conditions** such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, heart conditions, metabolic disorders, diabetes, seizure disorders, and long-term respiratory problems including severe asthma and cystic fibrosis.
- Children with **motor (muscle) disorders** that make it hard for them to breath, cough deeply or to keep their airway clear are more vulnerable to serious complications of the flu.
- Children with **immune disorders** or some genetic disorders (such as Down syndrome) are at more risk of complications from the flu itself or from secondary bacterial infections, including pneumonia.

How can I protect my family from the flu?

- Get family members above age six months **vaccinated** for *both* seasonal flu and H1N1. Vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu and its complications.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw away used tissues.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the length of time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song). If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Is H1N1 vaccine safe?

- The H1N1 vaccine is made in the same way as the seasonal flu vaccine, which has a very good safety record.
- Like any medication, vaccines may have side effects. People who get vaccinated against H1N1 will be screened for any reason that they shouldn't be vaccinated, such as egg allergy.
- Careful and repeated studies show that flu vaccines are safe and effective.

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Do flu vaccines contain thimerosal?

- Some flu vaccine is produced in multi-dose vials which contain thimerosal, a preservative, to safeguard against possible contamination once the vial is opened.
- There are single dose units of the shot (inactivated virus) that do not contain thimerosal.
- The nasal spray form of the vaccine does not contain thimerosal.
- Talk to your health care provider about whether your child should receive the shot or nasal spray.

When should I contact my health care provider?

- **Call your health care provider immediately or seek emergency care if your child has any of these symptoms:**
 - ✓ Trouble breathing or fast breathing.
 - ✓ Not drinking and not urinating as much as usual.
 - ✓ Crabby and very difficult to calm down even after the fever goes down.
 - ✓ Bluish or gray skin color.
 - ✓ Not waking up as usual.
 - ✓ Acting different than usual.

Where can I get an H1N1 (swine flu) vaccination?

Many places will offer H1N1 vaccinations including doctor's offices, schools, workplaces, pharmacies and public health agencies. Check these sources for information about vaccination sites near you, but be aware that supplies are limited at first and you may need to check again in the coming weeks to find out when it is available:

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department (www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/h1n1_getvaccine.htm)
- A retail pharmacy

You may also be able to find information in your local newspaper or through television or radio.

Online resources:

- Federal Government: www.flu.gov/individualfamily/index.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm
- Washington State Department of Health: www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/default.htm

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats.
To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 1-800-833-6388).