

## 2009 H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: What are the H1N1 priority lists and why?**

**A:** Because the amount of vaccine coming into the state is still relatively small, it is being targeted to certain groups of people who are at greatest risk of infection or complications from the 2009 H1N1 influenza. The Minnesota Department of Health is recommending that providers and local health departments use their vaccine for the following groups of people:

- pregnant women
- persons who live with or provide care for infants aged < 6 months
- health-care and emergency medical services personnel who have direct contact with patients or infectious material
- children aged 6 months through 4 years
- children and adolescents aged 5-18 who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications

Individuals over the age of 65 do not appear to be at high risk for contracting the 2009 H1N1 influenza due to their exposure to the swine flu in the late 1970's.

As the amount of vaccine in the state accumulates and the size of the shipments increases, health officials will be able to open up the vaccine for larger priority groups. Health officials at MDH and CDC are currently estimating that it will be mid-to late November before that happens.

It is difficult to say exactly when H1N1 vaccine supplies will be open to the general public, including people not in one of the priority groups. A lot depends on how quickly the manufacturers are able to produce the vaccine.

We expect that eventually there will be enough vaccine in the state for anyone who wants to be vaccinated. Even if that happens in December or January, it will not be too late to be vaccinated. There is still likely to be plenty of H1N1 influenza circulating in the state at that time, and getting vaccinated will still provide the best protection against the disease. A typical flu season in Minnesota lasts through April.

### **Q: If someone in the targeted groups has already been sick with Influenza Like Illness, should they get the H1N1 vaccination?**

**A:** If someone has been home sick with Influenza Like Illness, it has been recommended that they still receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccination, either with the Flu Mist (if they qualify based on their answers to the health related questions on the consent form), or the injectable version. The only qualifying reason to not be vaccinated is if your case has been confirmed as H1N1 by the Minnesota Department of Health laboratories.

The symptoms of influenza (flu-like illnesses) are similar to those caused by many other viruses. Even when influenza viruses are causing large numbers of people to get sick, other viruses are also causing illnesses. Specific testing, called "RT-PCR test," is needed in order to tell if an illness is caused by a specific influenza strain or by some other virus. This test is only done at the Minnesota Department of Health and is different from rapid flu tests that doctors can do in their offices. Since most people with flu-like illnesses will not be tested with RT-PCR this season, the majority will not know whether they have been infected with 2009 H1N1 flu or a different virus.

Therefore, if you were ill but do not know if you had 2009 H1N1 infection, you should get vaccinated, if your doctor recommends it. So, most people recommended for 2009 H1N1 vaccination should be vaccinated with the 2009 H1N1 vaccine regardless of whether they had a flu-like illness earlier in the year. If you have had 2009 H1N1 flu, as confirmed by an RT-PCR

test, you should have some immunity against 2009 H1N1 flu and can choose not to get the 2009 H1N1 vaccine. However, vaccination of a person with some existing immunity to the 2009 H1N1 virus will not be harmful.

Any immunity from 2009 H1N1 influenza infection or vaccination will not provide protection against seasonal influenza. All people who want protection from seasonal flu should still get their seasonal influenza vaccine.

**Q: How far apart should I get the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine?**

**A:** The seasonal and H1N1 **injectable** flu vaccines can be given at the same time, with no restrictions on time in between. However, if you want the **flu mist** for both seasonal and H1N1, you must wait 4 weeks between those applications. If you want one flu vaccine injectable and the other flu vaccine as the flu mist, there is no wait time in between.

**Q: Can I bring younger children to the school-based H1N1 vaccination clinics?**

**A:** No, the school-based H1N1 vaccination clinics are for those children enrolled in school. Public Health only ordered enough vaccine for those school-aged children. Medical clinics in Douglas County ordered the vaccine for those aged 6 months to 4 years old.

**Q: Will the staff at the schools be able to be immunized at the school-based clinics?**

**A:** No, at this time, school staff is not in the priority groups that have been identified for the first round of vaccination.