

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport  
Ministry of Health Services

### H1N1 VACCINE INFORMATION

*Update: Feb. 1*

All British Columbians are now eligible to receive the H1N1 flu vaccine and can visit their local public health unit, physician's office or qualified pharmacist to be immunized.

British Columbians can use the [ImmunizeBC Flu Clinic Locator](#) to find a public health unit or pharmacy where they can be vaccinated. People can also call their family physician or check their regional health authority's website for more information on receiving the vaccine.

This Q&A and the [H1N1 web site](#) will be updated as more information becomes available.

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## **SAFETY:**

### **Q: Is the H1N1 flu vaccine safe?**

Vaccine safety is a priority and clinical trials have been conducted on an international level to assess safety and effectiveness. Health Canada is confident of this vaccine's health benefits and would not authorize a vaccine unless it had evidence that the benefits far outweigh the risks.

All vaccines in Canada are subject to a strict authorization process. Many drugs are authorized based on clinical trials that are conducted elsewhere in the world but in accordance with the international standards of Good Clinical Practices. There are strict manufacturing and clinical practice standards in place in other jurisdictions so that Health Canada can have confidence in the trial results.

### **Q: What is an adjuvanted vaccine?**

One version of the pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine is an adjuvanted vaccine. Adjuvants are compounds that boost the immune system's response to vaccine, allowing smaller doses to be used per person. A version of the H1N1 vaccine without adjuvant is also available in B.C.

### **Q: Is the adjuvant in the H1N1 flu vaccine safe?**

The adjuvant has been tested in over 45,000 people enrolled in clinical trials in the developed world and has been evaluated by Health Canada as part of the review of a mock avian flu (H5N1) prototype vaccine. Close to a million doses of the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine have now been given in B.C., and many more in Canada, since late October. This vaccine has also been used in the UK and European countries in the same time frame. No significant safety concerns regarding use of the adjuvanted vaccine have been raised.

While the unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine is recommended for pregnant women, the adjuvanted version is approved for everyone who wants to protect themselves from this pandemic and may be used in pregnancy if the unadjuvanted vaccine is not available.

## **FOR PREGNANT WOMEN:**

### **Q: Should pregnant women get the H1N1 vaccine?**

As an expectant mother it is natural to be concerned about your health and the health of your baby during the H1N1 flu virus pandemic. Throughout your pregnancy, you have probably heard a lot of advice about what to eat, how to exercise, and what to avoid in order to protect your baby's health. Taking the H1N1 flu vaccine is one more thing you can do to reduce the risk that catching the H1N1 flu virus poses to your health and your baby's health.

You may be hesitant about taking a vaccine to protect against H1N1 flu virus, or uncertain of which kind of vaccine is right for you. Here's what we know about the H1N1 flu vaccine.

There are two types of H1N1 flu vaccine: adjuvanted and unadjuvanted. Most Canadians will receive the adjuvanted vaccine. An adjuvant is a substance that boosts immune response. It is made up of naturally occurring oil, water and vitamin E. The unadjuvanted vaccine does not

include this booster. Both adjuvanted and unadjuvanted vaccines are available now across the country.

Pregnant women are not more likely to get the H1N1 flu virus than anyone else, but when they do get it, they are about five times more likely to be hospitalized and about three times more likely to suffer very serious complications. Pregnant women in the second half of pregnancy are among those at highest risk of severe outcomes from the pandemic H1N1 virus. Healthy pregnant women in the first half of pregnancy are at comparable risk to healthy non-pregnant women.

**Q: Which vaccine should pregnant women get - adjuvanted or unadjuvanted?**

Now that unadjuvanted vaccine is available in B.C., it should be preferentially offered to women throughout pregnancy.

In the lead up to when the unadjuvanted vaccine became available, public health advice was that adjuvanted vaccine should be offered to pregnant women at 20+ weeks' gestation and that pregnant women under 20 weeks gestation who have chronic medical conditions should have discussed with their health care provider the risks and benefits of receiving adjuvanted vaccine or waiting until unadjuvanted vaccine was available.

There are no known risks of using adjuvanted vaccine in pregnancy, and the recommendation to use unadjuvanted vaccine preferentially is precautionary due to insufficient data specifically on pregnant women.

**GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

**Q: Who should get the H1N1 flu vaccine now?**

All British Columbians who need and want the H1N1 vaccine are now eligible to receive the vaccine. For adults, one dose of the vaccine will be sufficient while children under 3 years old and those aged 3-9 years old with chronic conditions will need two half-doses.

People who choose to receive the H1N1 vaccine and for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time, if the seasonal vaccine is available in their area.

**Q: Where can I get the H1N1 flu vaccine?**

People are able to get immunized at their doctor's office, at a pharmacy by a qualified pharmacist, or at a local public health clinic.

British Columbians can use the Flu Clinic Locator at [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca) to find a public health unit or pharmacy where they can be vaccinated. People can also call their family physician or check their regional health authority's website for more information on receiving the vaccine.

**Q: I'm visiting B.C. from outside Canada during the Olympics – can I receive the H1N1 vaccine while I'm here?**

Anyone visiting B.C. from out-of-country is eligible to be immunized with the H1N1 vaccine from B.C.'s publicly-funded stock.

All Olympic athletes who want to be vaccinated will be able to do so free-of-charge at the polyclinic located in each Athlete's Village.

If an out-of-country visitor would like to receive the vaccine while in B.C., they can be immunized by one of the 433 qualified pharmacists throughout the province, including 265 in the lower mainland. Visitors wishing to find a pharmacy providing flu clinics can use [ImmunizeBC's Flu Clinic Locator](#).

These visitors will be charged a fee for the administration of the vaccine, but the vaccine itself will be free-of-charge.

**Q: My child is under 6 months – which vaccine should he/she get?**

The H1N1 vaccine is not recommended for any child under 6 months of age. The vaccine is not known to be effective in such children. Instead, their household members should be immunized. Additional precautions such as hand washing and personal hygiene should be encouraged to prevent infecting young babies with influenza.

**Q: My child is 6 months to 9 years old – how many doses should he/she get?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada has updated its recommendations on H1N1 flu vaccine dosing for children between 3 years and 9 years of age. These recommendations apply to adjuvanted vaccine, which is the recommended vaccine for children under 10 years old.

The updated recommendations include three components:

- Children between 6 months of age and under 3 years of age should receive two half-doses of adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine, administered at least 21 days apart. Guidance for children in this age group is unchanged.
- Children with chronic health conditions who are 3 to 9 years of age should receive their first half-dose of the H1N1 flu vaccine as soon as possible. They should also receive a second half-dose of the H1N1 flu vaccine. The interval between the two half-doses should be a minimum of 21 days. Guidance for children in this group is unchanged.
- Healthy children between 3 and 9 years of age should only receive a single half-dose of the H1N1 vaccine, and do not need to return for a second vaccine for now. This is a new recommendation and may be further updated as more information becomes available.

These updated recommendations reflect findings from clinical trial results from Europe that show a single half-dose of adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine for healthy children provides an acceptable level of protection from infection from the H1N1 flu virus.

Further adjustments to the vaccine dosage recommendations may be made once the results of additional research and clinical trials on vaccine effectiveness are available.

**Q: Will taking only one half-dose of pandemic H1N1 vaccine mean that children might be protected for a shorter time than if they take two half-doses?**

There is currently no data on the duration of immunity following immunization and we will need to wait for results of further research. This is why we are monitoring it closely and if there is an indication that immunity wanes quickly after a single half-dose, a recommendation for a second half-dose will be reconsidered.

**Q: My child is between 10 and 18 years (inclusive) – which vaccine should he/she get?**

Any healthy child aged 10 to 18 years (inclusive) is now eligible and recommended to receive one full dose of either H1N1 vaccine. For children in this age range with chronic medical conditions, the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine is preferable.

**Q: I'm an adult (19-64 years) – which vaccine should I get?**

Adults aged 19-64 years with chronic medical conditions have been eligible for H1N1 vaccine since the start of the immunization program. They should receive one dose of the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine.

Healthy adults between the ages of 19-64 (inclusive) are also now eligible to receive the vaccine. They should receive either the adjuvanted or unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine.

**Q: I'm 65 years or over – do I need the H1N1 flu vaccine?**

While it appears that people 65 years or over have a much lower risk of contracting the H1N1 flu virus than younger people, the H1N1 vaccine is still recommended, especially those with underlying medical conditions.

All people with chronic medical conditions are now eligible and recommended to receive the adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine.

Healthy people 65 years and over are also now eligible and it is recommended that they should receive the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine.

**Q: What is the difference between the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine and the regular flu vaccine?**

The pandemic H1N1 vaccine will reduce your risk of getting the pandemic H1N1 flu virus. The regular flu vaccine will reduce your risk of getting three strains of seasonal flu that global public health officials anticipate to be the prominent strains this particular year (not including the pandemic strain of H1N1).

**Q: Should I get the pandemic H1N1 vaccine and the regular flu vaccine or only one?**

After extensive consideration at the national level, B.C. public health experts and the Provincial Health Officer are recommending that those British Columbians who normally receive the seasonal flu vaccine receive that vaccine at the same time as their H1N1 shot if available from their immunization service provider.

When people get their H1N1 vaccine, if they are normally recommended to get the seasonal vaccine, they are encouraged to get both. People wishing to receive both vaccines but not at the same time should receive the H1N1 vaccine first.

For people considering only getting a seasonal flu shot, they are encouraged to speak with a doctor or their family physician beforehand to discuss the benefits and risks. This should include consideration of Canadian research that shows those who get the seasonal shot before the H1N1 shot may be twice as likely to contract H1N1.

**Q: What constitutes a chronic medical condition?**

These conditions are based on National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommendations for influenza vaccine receipt, which reflect increased risk of influenza-related complications including hospitalization and death. These conditions include:

- cardiac or pulmonary disorders (including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis and asthma);
- diabetes mellitus and other metabolic diseases;
- cancer, immunodeficiency, immunosuppression (due to underlying disease and/or therapy);
- chronic kidney disease;
- chronic liver disease, including hepatitis C;
- anaemia or hemoglobinopathy;
- conditions that compromise the management of respiratory secretions and are associated with an increased risk of aspiration; or
- children and adolescents with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid.

**Q: If the H1N1 flu is expected to be so dominant, why offer the seasonal flu vaccine at all?**

In the southern hemisphere, the seasonal flu was still circulating even though the H1N1 flu virus was the main strain. It is impossible to guarantee that seasonal flu will not occur in B.C. during the fall and winter, but if it does, the most vulnerable people will have been protected at no increased risk to them.

As such, B.C. is offering the possibility of co-administration of the H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines. When people get their H1N1 vaccine, if they are normally recommended to get the seasonal vaccine, they can get both vaccines at the same time, one in each arm.

For people considering only getting a seasonal flu shot, they are encouraged to speak with a doctor or their family physician beforehand to discuss the benefits and risks. This should include

consideration of Canadian research that shows those who get the seasonal shot before the H1N1 shot may be twice as likely to contract H1N1.

**Q: Where can I get more information?**

You can call [HealthLink BC](#) at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or are concerned about any illness/symptoms you're experiencing.

To find out where to get your H1N1 flu vaccine, use the Flu Clinic Locator at [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca). For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1).

