



New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
September 28, 2010

Frequently Asked Questions about the 2010–11 Flu Season

1. Is the pandemic over?

The World Health Organization declared the H1N1 pandemic over when cases of illness decreased worldwide, but the virus continues to circulate and cause illness both in the United States and abroad.

2. Will the H1N1 virus return this season?

Influenza season happens every year. While flu seasons are unpredictable and there is no way to know for sure, scientists and health professionals believe H1N1 will be one of the flu strains circulating and causing illness this year in the United States and New Hampshire.

3. Is the H1N1 vaccine still available?

The influenza vaccine this year contains three strains, as it usually does. This year they are: the H1N1 A strain, an H3N2 A strain, and an influenza B strain. So there is no longer a separate H1N1 vaccine, as it is now part of the seasonal flu vaccine.

4. Do I need to get this year's vaccine if I got the H1N1 vaccine last year?

Yes. The immunity a person gets from the vaccine lasts about 8 to 12 months so it is important for people to get the flu vaccine every year. In addition, the strains circulating among the population are continually changing.

5. Do I need to get this year's vaccine if I got the seasonal flu vaccine last year?

Yes, because the strains in this year's vaccine are not the same as the ones in last year's seasonal flu vaccine and immunity from the flu vaccine wears off.

6. Should children get only one dose or two?

For children between 6 months and 8 years of age, it sometimes takes two doses to build up enough immunity. This depends on the child's vaccine history so check with your healthcare provider to be sure.

7. What groups should get this year's flu vaccine?

This year for the first time the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending that everyone over the age of 6 months receive the flu vaccine. Those with underlying medical conditions, children and young adults, and pregnant women continue to be considered at risk for complications from influenza.

8. Why is vaccine available earlier this year than in past years and shouldn't I wait to get it?

The federal government has been working with vaccine manufacturers to try to increase their capacity to produce flu vaccine doses, in an effort to be ready for a pandemic and to vaccinate

more people. Since the manufacturers have more capacity they were able to make more vaccine earlier this year than in past years. You should get the flu vaccine as soon as you can.

9. Since H1N1 is new, how do I know this combination vaccine is safe?

The flu vaccine, including last year's H1N1 pandemic vaccine, has an excellent track record for safety. The standards for production of the flu vaccine are rigorous and have been in place for many years. Approximately 100 million doses of influenza vaccine are given out each year in the United States.

10. Will there be free public clinics this year like last year?

Last season, the federal government provided the H1N1 vaccine and funding for states to offer special clinics to give people this additional vaccine. The seasonal vaccine last year, as in past years, was distributed by traditional methods. The H1N1 vaccine was produced as soon as possible after the virus emerged, but H1N1's appearance among the population in Mexico and the U.S. in April was too late for it to be included in the seasonal vaccine. Since this year the H1N1 strain is included in the seasonal vaccine it will be distributed through the usual means, e.g., doctor's offices and pharmacies, and there will not be large public clinics in New Hampshire.

11. Why is there a change in the recommendation of who should get the vaccine from last year?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been working to increase production of influenza vaccine so that it can be offered to more people. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) now recommends the flu vaccine for everyone over the age of six months because everyone is vulnerable to this illness and thousands of people die each year in the United States due to influenza. The vaccine has not been approved, however, for children younger than 6 months of age.

12. Seniors were not recommended to get the H1N1 vaccine last year so should they get a flu shot this year?

Seniors have always been recommended to get the influenza vaccine and this will continue this year. During last year's flu season, they were not "at the front of the line" for H1N1 vaccine because the virus generally spared people over age 60. This was thought to be due to pre-existing immunity. The flu strains that circulate among the population are always changing, and seniors, as usual, are recommended to receive the seasonal flu vaccine this year.

13. Are there people who are especially urged to get the flu vaccine?

Yes. Though everyone should get the vaccine and is encouraged to do so, certain people are at increased risk of severe illness. Therefore, the following people should definitely get the flu vaccine every year: pregnant women; people age 50 and older; people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, or a compromised immune system; and people who live with or care for those at high risk of flu complications, including healthcare workers, household contacts of people at high risk, and household contacts and caregivers of children younger than 6 months of age (because they are too young to be vaccinated).

14. Who should not get the vaccine?

There are people who should not receive the flu vaccine, including children younger than 6 months, people with severe allergy to chicken eggs, people who have had a severe reaction to influenza vaccine in the past, and people who previously developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of influenza vaccination.

15. Is the nasal spray form of the vaccine safe and who should get it?

Candidates for the nasal spray version of the vaccine are healthy people aged 2-49 who are not pregnant. People in these categories are encouraged to consider this vaccine. It has been shown to be as safe as the injected vaccine, it cannot make you or anyone else sick with the flu, and in some cases it has been shown to be more effective than the shot.

16. What if my insurance won't pay for the vaccine or I can't afford it?

Community health centers in New Hampshire offer the flu vaccine to patients who are uninsured or underinsured.

17. Why do pharmacies and grocery stores have the vaccine and is it the same one my doctor has?

Private businesses that have the capability to deliver the vaccine, such as pharmacies, can order the vaccine directly from the manufacturers and sell it to the public. This is the same vaccine ordered and dispensed by physicians.

18. Do children in New Hampshire still receive the flu vaccine for free?

With federal funding, State dollars, and special funding from the New Hampshire licensed health insurance companies, the Vaccines for Children Program through the New Hampshire Immunization Program at DHHS provides all vaccines for children up through age 18 free of charge. Contact your healthcare provider to inquire about the flu vaccine and other vaccines for your children.

19. How can I find out where vaccine is being offered near me?

Maxim Health Systems offers a tool that allows you to find flu vaccine being offered near you. Just go to www.findaflushot.com and enter the appropriate information.

20. How else can I protect myself and my family from the flu?

The flu vaccine is the single best way to protect yourself and your family from the flu virus. It is also important to avoid spreading the flu and other viruses by not sharing drinks or utensils, coughing and sneezing into your sleeve, washing hands frequently with soap and water, and staying home from work and school when you are sick.

For more information about influenza, visit the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Service website at: www.dhhs.nh.gov or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.