

10 Important Things You Need to Know About H1N1 Flu

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

1. No cause for panic, however there is need for concern. The good news - So far, H1N1 flu doesn't appear more threatening than regular seasonal flu and the virus hasn't dramatically changed since spring. **The bad news** – things can change and often do. More people will be susceptible to H1N1 flu because it is a new strain of flu with no natural immunity; as a result, more will probably get sick from this virus.

2. Some get it worse than others – The CDC has developed 5 priority groups for vaccination based on their risk; they are:

- Pregnant women
- Caregivers of children 6 months and younger
- People 25 to 64 with health problems like asthma, diabetes and heart disease.
- Children from 6 months to 24 years old
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel

3. Wash your hands, often - As with seasonal flu, H1N1 flu spreads through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick. Everyone (not just kids) should wash their hands often, using soap and water, for about 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers work well too.

4. Planning and preparation is happening now- Once the vaccine for H1N1 is released, it will be targeted at the 5 groups detailed above. All vaccine will be coordinated through your local Health Department. The Health Department is currently working with local hospitals, schools, physicians and pharmacies to assure that the vaccine gets to the target groups as quickly as possible once it arrives. Prior to the vaccine being ready, prevention is the key (wash hands, cover cough, stay home if sick).

5. A H1N1 vaccine should be ready in October - Millions of H1N1 flu shots should be available by mid-October. If you are in one of the 5 priority groups, vaccine will be offered to you first. Most school children should be able to get vaccinated at school but will need parental permission to get the vaccine. Permission slips will be sent to parents by your school. Remember, the H1N1 flu vaccine does not prevent seasonal flu, and the seasonal flu shot does not prevent H1N1 flu. This flu season, you will need both to be protected from both.

6. Immunity takes time - Even those first in line for shots won't have immunity right away and children less than 10 will most likely need 2 shots, given at least 3 weeks apart. After you have had your shot it takes a week or two for the vaccine to take full effect.

7. Vaccine safety is a priority - Health officials presume the H1N1 flu vaccine is safe and effective and are testing it to be sure. The process for manufacturing this vaccine is identical to that of the seasonal flu shot except that they are using the new flu strain. 100's of millions of Americans have received seasonal flu shots for decades with an excellent safety record and we expect similar results with the H1N1 vaccine.

8. Surrounded by H1N1 flu – what do I do now? - If an outbreak of H1N1 flu hits your school, workplace or community before you're vaccinated; be extra cautious. Stay away from public gathering places like malls, sports events and churches. Try to keep your distance from people especially if they are sick. Keep washing your hands frequently and keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth as those are the most common points that a flu virus enters your system.

9. What if you get sick? - If you have chronic health problems or are pregnant and develop flu-like symptoms, call your doctor right away. You may be prescribed an anti-viral medicine. These drugs can reduce the severity of H1N1 flu if taken right after symptoms start. Most people should just stay home and rest. Cough into your elbow or shoulder. Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever breaks without the use of medication. Fluids and pain relievers like Tylenol can help with achiness and fever.

10. Keep up to date with what is going on in your community. Listen to the local TV and radio news, read the local papers. Check us out on the web at www.bhsj.org or the federal site at www.flu.gov as they are updated as things change. We will be posting information about vaccine availability at www.bhsj.org once the vaccine begins to arrive. We will be working diligently to assure the 5 target groups get vaccinated and then we will be offering shots to others who may wish to receive them.

For more information about H1N1 contact us at any of our 3 offices

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