

H1N1 and Seasonal Vaccine Information

Update: October 1, 2009

The H1N1 flu vaccine is expected to arrive in the Yukon in November – or possibly earlier – and will be available free of charge. The vaccine will be available to all Yukon residents who need and want to receive it.

The H1N1 Vaccine

Q: Will the H1N1 flu vaccine arrive in time to protect me?

The federal government currently expects a safe and effective H1N1 flu vaccine to arrive on time in November. That said, Health Canada remains adaptive to the situation at hand and, should the virus begin to result in more than just the relatively mild illnesses we have seen so far, it is possible the vaccine could be made available as early as mid-October.

Q: Is the H1N1 flu vaccine safe?

Vaccine safety is a priority and clinical trials will be conducted on an international level to assess safety and effectiveness. Public safety is paramount: in working with federal partners, the Territory will strike the right balance between the need to have an H1N1 vaccine available quickly, and the imperative to ensure the vaccine is safe and effective.

The Government of Canada is confident that the vaccine can be quickly and efficiently approved, and that this process will ensure a safe and effective product for all Yukon residents and all Canadians.

Q: Who should get the H1N1 flu vaccine?

All Yukon residents who need and want the H1N1 vaccine will be able to receive it.

Those who will benefit most from immunization include:

- People under 65 with chronic conditions
- Pregnant women
- Children 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- Persons residing in remote and isolated settings or communities
- Health care workers involved in pandemic response or the delivery of essential health care services
- Household contacts and care providers of persons at high risk who cannot be immunized or may not respond to vaccines
- Populations otherwise identified as high risk. First Nations individuals have been found in some areas of Canada to be at higher risk of severe disease and we are encouraging all Yukoners over 6 months of age who are of aboriginal origin to be vaccinated.

Others who would benefit from immunization include:

- Adults 65 years of age and over
- Residents of long term care facilities
- Children 5 to 18 (inclusive) years of age
- Adults 19 to 64 (inclusive) years of age
- First responders

Q: Should pregnant women receive the H1N1 flu vaccine?

The World Health Organization's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) recommended in July that pregnant women and children aged 6-36 months of age should receive non-adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine where possible, but that an adjuvant H1N1 vaccine could be used if the non-adjuvanted type were unavailable.

To align with this recommendation, the Government of Canada has ordered 1.8 million doses of non-adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine which will be reserved specifically for pregnant women and children between the ages of 6 months and 3 years old.

Canada's recommendations on the use of both adjuvanted and non-adjuvanted vaccine will be based on clinical safety and effectiveness data, as well as the latest epidemiological data on the spread of the virus. We strongly recommend that pregnant women be vaccinated against H1N1.

Q: Where can I get the H1N1 flu vaccine?

Once the vaccine arrives in the Yukon people living outside of Whitehorse will be able to get immunized at their local community health centre. In Whitehorse, immunization clinics will be occurring throughout the city and will be well advertised once these clinic locations are confirmed. More information will be posted on the Yukon Health and Social Services website about how you can find the flu clinic closest to you.

Q: Will I need to get one or two doses of the vaccine?

This will be assessed when H1N1 vaccines have been subjected to clinical trials, which will analyze results after both the first and second doses. This information will then confirm the course of treatment that is required for full protection.

Differences between H1N1 and Regular Seasonal Vaccine

Q: What's the difference between the H1N1 flu vaccine and the regular flu vaccine?

The H1N1 vaccine will protect you against the H1N1 flu virus. The regular flu vaccine will be very similar to last year's flu vaccine and is designed to protect you against three strains of seasonal flu that are estimated to be the most likely to circulate this winter (apart from H1N1).

In October, the seasonal flu vaccine will be offered to people 65 and older, and residents in long-term care homes. Starting in November, the H1N1 flu vaccine will be rolled out and will be available to everyone who needs and wants it. Plans for the seasonal flu vaccine for the rest of Yukon's population will be finalized following the launch of the H1N1 vaccination campaign.

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

Those people 65 and older and those who live in long-term care homes should receive the seasonal flu shot when it's available to them beginning in October.

It's anticipated that, similar to the experience in the Southern hemisphere, the pandemic H1N1 flu virus will be the predominant strain of influenza, at least over the next 3 months. For the majority of the population, H1N1 is the virus they will need to be protected against. Starting in November, the H1N1 flu vaccine will be rolled out and will be available to everyone who needs and wants it.

Although we anticipate offering the seasonal flu vaccine to everyone else under the age of 65 according to the usual guidelines by the end of this year or early next year, plans for seasonal vaccination will only be finalized after the Yukoners have had the opportunity to be vaccinated against H1N1 influenza.

Q: If you expect the H1N1 flu to be so predominant, 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's impossible to guarantee that seasonal flu will not occur here during the fall, but if it does, the most vulnerable people will have been protected at no increased risk to them.

As such, Yukon will still offer the vaccine to those who are 65 years of age and over and residents of long-term care homes because it's known the elderly are more susceptible to serious complications and hospitalization from seasonal flu.

At the same time, the evidence to date has shown that older people are generally less likely to become infected with the H1N1 flu virus.

Q: Where can I get more information?

You can call the Yukon HealthLine 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.

For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, visit <http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/>.

Q: What is an adjuvanted vaccine?

An adjuvant is a substance that is added to a vaccine in order to boost the individual's response. The use of an adjuvant reduces the amount of vaccine that is needed and generally means that more vaccine is available. Another potential benefit of using an adjuvant is that it may provide protection against mutating flu virus strains.

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

The adjuvant has been tested in more than 45,000 people around the world and has been evaluated by Health Canada as part of the review of a mock Avian flu (H5N1) prototype vaccine. No significant safety concerns regarding use of the adjuvanted vaccine have been raised.

Both the adjuvanted and non-adjuvanted versions of the H1N1 flu vaccine will be tested in clinical trials before it is approved for use in Canada.

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To align with this recommendation, the Government of Canada has ordered 1.8 million doses of non-adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine which will be reserved specifically for pregnant women and children between the ages of 6 months and 3 years old.

The purchase of a small quantity of non-adjuvanted vaccine is a precautionary measure for pregnant women and children aged 6-36 months as no clinical data of the safety of adjuvanted vaccine in this group is available.

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