




The H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Vaccines

What you need to
know about this year's
influenza vaccines

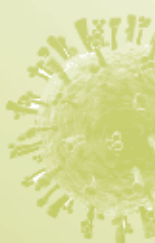


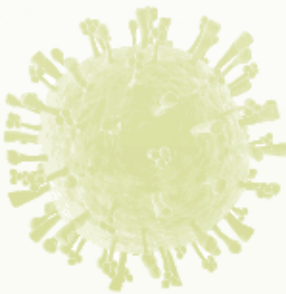
Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. There are two separate flu shots being offered this year. One is the regular seasonal flu shot, which protects against three prevalent flu strains identified around the world. The other one is specific to the H1N1 virus.

The H1N1 virus is getting its own vaccine this year because it is new and we have no natural immunities against it. The vaccine for the H1N1 virus was developed in the same way as seasonal flu vaccines are developed every year. It underwent the same rigorous testing and had to satisfy Health Canada's safety requirements before being approved for use.

All flu vaccines are developed from killed flu, and cannot give you the flu. Most flu vaccines are up to 80 per cent effective on any given year, but the H1N1 vaccine's clinical trials indicate that 85 to 98 per cent of healthy adults will develop a strong immunity against the H1N1 flu. As with any flu vaccine, it may take between 10 to 14 days for the vaccine to reach full effectiveness.

The Medical Officer of Health is encouraging all Yukoners over six months of age to receive both flu vaccines this year. People most at risk of complications from the flu include:

- ▶ Children under five years of age, especially those less than two years old;
 - ▶ Women who are pregnant, especially over 20 weeks;
 - ▶ Those with existing medical conditions;
 - ▶ Those with weak immune systems either from diseases or medications;
 - ▶ Those 65 years old and over; and
 - ▶ Those who are markedly obese.
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Below is a list of symptoms to expect if you get the flu, as well as reactions to the flu shots:

The flu may cause:

- ▶ high fever
- ▶ cough
- ▶ tiredness
- ▶ muscle aches
- ▶ sore throat
- ▶ headache
- ▶ runny nose
- ▶ decreased appetite
- ▶ sometimes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

Complications of the flu may include:

- ▶ pneumonia
- ▶ ear infections
- ▶ bronchitis
- ▶ Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)
- ▶ worsening of existing medical conditions

Vaccination may cause for 1–2 days:

- ▶ pain, redness, swelling at the injection site

Less commonly:

- ▶ tiredness
- ▶ muscle and joint pain
- ▶ headache
- ▶ younger children may experience fever, drowsiness, irritability and loss of appetite

To relieve these symptoms:

- ▶ apply a cold, damp compress to the vaccine site
- ▶ take or administer acetaminophen-type medication
- ▶ call your health centre if symptoms persist over 48 hours

Who should not get influenza vaccine(s):

- ▶ Anyone who has had a life-threatening allergic reaction (swelling of the throat, hives, low blood pressure, shock) to a previous dose of seasonal influenza vaccine or any component of influenza vaccine such as thimerosal, or
- ▶ Anyone who has a life-threatening allergy to eggs, or
- ▶ Anyone who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within eight weeks of getting any influenza vaccine, and
- ▶ Children less than six months of age should not get influenza vaccines because influenza vaccines are not effective in this age group

Please talk with your health care provider about options for you.

Precautions include:

- ▶ Anyone with a high fever or moderate illness should wait until recovered before receiving the influenza vaccine(s).
- ▶ Persons with blood disorders or receiving blood thinning medications should ensure the nurse is made aware so further information can be provided prior to the vaccination.
- ▶ As with many vaccines, persons with a new or evolving neurological medical condition should consult with primary health care providers prior to receiving influenza vaccines.

Recommendations in pregnancy:

H1N1 vaccine recommendations for pregnant women vary depending on the stage of pregnancy — please discuss with the nurse providing your vaccine.

Questions?

Why do I need both vaccines?

The seasonal flu shot is the one offered every year. It protects against the most likely strains of flu that are identified each year. The H1N1 flu vaccine protects specifically against the H1N1 strain of flu. Getting both vaccines offers the best protection this year.

Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?

Health Canada must approve the use of all vaccines for Canadians, subject to the provisions of the *Food and Drugs Act* and the Food and Drug Regulations. On-site evaluations of the manufacturer's facilities ensure quality control for the vaccines. Samples of the manufacturer's batches are also tested in Health Canada laboratories. Only when Health Canada is satisfied that the health benefits of the vaccine outweigh any possible risk is the vaccine released. For more specific information, visit www.fightflu.ca.

I am healthy.

Why should I get any vaccine?

Getting yourself vaccinated protects you and everyone around you. Not everybody can get vaccinated, because of allergies, for instance. The very young and elderly are traditionally at greater risk of complications from the seasonal flu, but research is indicating that pregnant women are at greater risk of complications from the H1N1 flu, and there is a small but real risk even among normally healthy people of severe complications from the H1N1 flu. The greater the number of people vaccinated, the better the chance of limiting the spread of the illness.

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 is very similar to last year's flu vaccine and is designed to protect you against three strains of seasonal flu that are the most likely to circulate this winter. The regular flu vaccine does not protect you against H1N1.

Is it safe to get both shots at the same time?

Yes. Yukon offers both vaccines at the same time for logistical reasons.

What is an adjuvanted vaccine?

The adjuvant in the H1N1 is an immune booster. It is made of naturally occurring oil, water and vitamin E. This adjuvant boosts the body's immune response and increases the vaccine's effectiveness. Adding it to the vaccine allows us to use less vaccine for the same effect.

I've heard I can get sick from the vaccine. Is that true?

All Canadian vaccines use a killed virus. You cannot get the flu from the vaccination. However, it takes between 10 and 14 days for most people to reach immunity, so you are vulnerable during that period.

Is there mercury in the vaccine?

The vaccine contains a small quantity of Thimerosal, a type of mercury not linked with health problems.

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.

Canada's recommendations on the use of both adjuvanted and non-adjuvanted vaccine are 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.

Your question isn't listed here?

There are some good sources of information on H1N1, if you want to learn more. For a comprehensive list of questions and answers, we recommend you visit:

www.fightflu.ca

and go to the "Frequently Asked Questions" link.

www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1/attachments/fs_h1n1_vaccine_information_sept09.pdf

www.sogc.org/h1n1/factsheet/forH1N1UpdateAdjuvantVsNonAdjuvantVaccine091020-Final.pdf

www.gov.yk.ca/2193.html

You can also call 811, 24 hours a day — seven days a week.