



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH

# This year it's a different flu season.

## H1N1 Flu Vaccine Question and Answer Information Sheet

**Released: November 18, 2009**

This year there are two flu vaccines— one for seasonal flu and one for the H1N1 flu virus. This fact sheet provides information about the H1N1 flu vaccine.

### When can I get my H1N1 flu shot?

At first, Region of Waterloo Public Health received only small amounts of the H1N1 flu shot, so the shot was given to people at highest risk of complications first. Beginning November 18, the H1N1 flu shot is available to all residents of Waterloo Region who are 6 months of age or older.

### Where can I get my H1N1 flu shot?

The H1N1 flu shot is available from most family doctors in Waterloo Region. Those who do not have a family doctor or whose family doctor is not giving the H1N1 flu shot can get their shot from public health clinics. Public health clinics are being offered at locations across Waterloo Region. Clinic schedules are posted on Waterloo Region's pandemic website— [www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca](http://www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca)—*please refresh your web browser for the most up-to-date clinic schedules*. Individuals without internet access can phone Public Health's flu line at **519-883-2324** for a listing of upcoming immunization clinics. Individuals can also phone Public Health's H1N1 general information line **519-883-2289** if they wish to speak with someone.

### Can I get the H1N1 flu shot at my workplace?

No. At this time, the Ministry of Health has not approved nursing agencies to give the H1N1 flu shot so workplaces are unable to offer H1N1 immunization clinics. People are asked to get the shot through their primary care provider (doctor) or at one of Public Health's clinics.

### What about the seasonal flu shot?

At this time, the seasonal flu shot is being recommended to persons aged 65 years or older. This is because people aged 65 years and older are at much higher risk of serious illness from seasonal flu.

Public Health clinics for the seasonal flu shot will be held once the H1N1 flu shot clinics are completed (in December 2009).

### What is in the H1N1 flu shot?

The H1N1 flu shot has two ingredients, an "antigen" and an "adjuvant". The antigen is the active ingredient that helps your body become immune to the H1N1 flu virus. The antigen is not a live virus, so will not make you sick with the H1N1 flu. The adjuvant in the H1N1 flu shot is made up of natural ingredients such as fish oil, water and vitamin E. Adjuvant is added to the H1N1 flu shot to boost the body's response to the vaccine. When adjuvant is added to vaccine, less active ingredient (i.e. antigen) is needed. That way we can produce more vaccine for everyone.

### What is an adjuvant?

An "adjuvant" is added to vaccines so that less of the active ingredient (i.e. antigen) is required to boost the body's response to vaccine. The adjuvant in the H1N1 flu shot is made up of natural ingredients such as fish oil, water, and vitamin E.



### Do I need one or two doses of the H1N1 flu shot?

All persons over the age of 10 years will need only one dose of the H1N1 flu shot.

The following chart details the number of doses recommended for children between 6 months and 9 years of age. There are differences based on the age and health status of the child. Children under 6 months of age can not get the H1N1 flu shot.

Age of Child	Number of Doses
Age 6 months to less than 3 years	2 half-doses of adjuvanted vaccine. There should be a minimum of 21 days between the 2 half-doses.
Age 3 to 9 years— <i>Healthy children</i>	1 half-dose adjuvanted vaccine, for now*
Age 3 to 9 years— <i>Children with chronic medical conditions**</i>	2 half-doses of adjuvanted vaccine There should be a minimum of 21 days between the 2 half-doses.

\* These recommendations may be updated as more information becomes available.

\*\* Chronic medical conditions are defined as conditions “significant enough to require regular medical-follow-up.”

### What is the unadjuvanted H1N1 flu shot? Should pregnant women receive the adjuvanted or unadjuvanted vaccine?

There are two types of H1N1 vaccine approved by Health Canada for pregnant women: the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine and the unadjuvanted (or non-adjuvanted) H1N1 vaccine. An adjuvant is a substance that helps stimulate the body’s immune response. The adjuvant in the H1N1 vaccine is made up of natural ingredients such as fish oil, water, and vitamin E.

Now that it is available, the unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine (previously unavailable) is the vaccine being offered to pregnant women in Canada.

Pregnant women are asked to call their physician or the health unit at 519-883-2272, to make an appointment to receive the vaccine.

N.B. For pregnant women who received the adjuvanted vaccine when the unadjuvanted vaccine was unavailable, the adjuvanted vaccine is also safe for pregnant women. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) provided an update on October 30, 2009 after having looked at the safety profile of adjuvanted and unadjuvanted pandemic influenza vaccines in clinical trials and in deployment. The Strategic Advisory Group of Experts concluded that the safety profile was good, and stated that pregnant women can be immunized with either the adjuvanted or unadjuvanted vaccine.

### Is it true that there is mercury in the vaccine? How much mercury?

The H1N1 vaccine contains a small amount of thimerosal. Thimerosal is a form of mercury used in the H1N1 flu vaccine to stabilize it and maintain its quality during storage. Thimerosal is a different form of mercury than the mercury known to cause health problems. The amount in the H1N1 adjuvanted flu vaccine is much less than the daily limit recommended for environmental exposure to mercury. For example, there is significantly less mercury in the vaccine than you would find in a can of tuna fish.



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### **Is the H1N1 flu virus vaccine safe?**

Yes. Health Canada is responsible for approving vaccines. They have a strong regulatory process to ensure the vaccines are safe before they are given to the general public. Health Canada has done a review of both the vaccine and the adjuvant. The benefit of immunization – the prevention of serious illness and death – far outweighs any risk associated with being immunized.

### **Are there any side effects?**

Side effects are expected to include: pain and swelling where the injection is given, tiredness, muscle and joint pain, and headaches. Children may have a mild fever, be tired and irritable and not want to eat.

The H1N1 vaccine is made exactly like the seasonal influenza vaccine that is produced each year, except for the addition of an adjuvant. (An adjuvant is a substance that helps stimulate the body's immune response. The adjuvant in the H1N1 vaccine is a natural product made of fish oil, water, and vitamin E.)

As with the seasonal influenza vaccine, it is expected that most side effects will be mild, and that serious side effects will be very rare.

### **Who should not receive the vaccine?**

The following groups of people should **NOT** receive the H1N1 flu vaccine:

- Infants under 6 months of age (the H1N1 flu vaccine is not approved for children under six months of age).
- Anyone who had a serious allergic reaction (i.e. developed hives, swelling of the mouth of throat, or trouble breathing) to:
  - A previous dose of the influenza vaccine
  - Eggs\*, egg products and chicken protein
  - Thimerosal (a mercury-based product in vaccines and contact lens solution)
  - Any other component of the vaccine
- Persons who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome within 8 weeks of receiving a seasonal flu vaccine.
- Have you been diagnosed with severe Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome (ORS) after a past Influenza vaccine?
- People who are currently seriously ill with an infection should wait until they recover before receiving the vaccine.

\*Note: If you a mild egg allergy please consult a health care provider (doctor) before immunization. You may be able to be immunized with some precautions.

### **Can people with fish allergies receive the vaccine?**

Yes. The part of the adjuvant that is extracted from shark liver oil is highly purified and part of the purification process involves a step which destroys potentially allergenic proteins.

### **How long will it take after I receive the vaccine to have immunity against the virus?**

After receiving the H1N1 flu vaccine, most people will start to develop immunity within 10 days.

### **Will there be enough of the H1N1 flu shot for everybody?**

There will be enough vaccine for every Ontarian who wants it. At first, Region of Waterloo Public Health received only small amounts of the H1N1 flu shot, so the shot was given to people at highest risk of complications first. There is more vaccine available now which is why the shot is now available to everyone in the Region over 6 months of age.



### Do I have to pay for the vaccine?

No. Nobody will have to pay for the vaccine.

### I already had my seasonal flu shot. How long do I need to wait before I can get the H1N1 flu virus vaccine?

You are able to get the H1N1 flu virus vaccine when it is available through your primary care provider (doctor) or at a Public Health clinic.

There is no minimal interval required between the seasonal influenza shot and the H1N1 flu shot

### Can you get the flu from the H1N1 vaccines?

No. The H1N1 flu vaccine is not a live vaccine (the virus is dead) so you are not able to get the flu from it.

### I think I had H1N1 already? Should I still get the vaccine?

Unless you've had laboratory confirmation that you had H1N1, we recommend you get the vaccine.

Even if you've had it, there is no harm in getting the vaccine.

### Who can I contact for more information?

For a listing of upcoming immunization clinics please contact Region of Waterloo Public Health's pre-recorded phone line at **519-883-2324**.

Individuals with questions about the H1N1 flu virus can contact Region of Waterloo Public Health's general information line at **519-883-2289**.

## H1N1 Flu Vaccine: Dosing Recommendations

### Adjuvanted Vaccine

An "adjuvant" is added to vaccines so that less of the active ingredient (i.e. antigen) is required to boost the body's response to vaccine. The adjuvant in the H1N1 flu shot is a natural product containing fish oil, water and vitamin E.

Category	Dosing Recommendation
Age 0 to 5 months	H1N1 flu vaccine not authorized for use
Age 6 to less than 3 years	2 half-doses of adjuvanted vaccine. There should be a minimum of 21 days between the 2 half-doses.
Age 3 to 9 years— <i>healthy children</i>	1 half-dose of adjuvanted vaccine, for now*.
Age 3 to 9 years— <i>children with chronic medical conditions**</i>	2 half-doses of adjuvanted vaccine. There should be a minimum of 21 days between the 2 half doses.
Age 10 years+ (including 65+)	1 dose adjuvanted vaccine



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\* These recommendations may be updated as more information becomes available.

\*\* Chronic medical conditions are defined as conditions “significant enough to require regular medical-follow-up.” Includes conditions such as:

- 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)
- renal disease
- anaemia or hemoglobinopathy
- conditions that compromise the management of respiratory secretions and are associated with an increased risk of aspiration
- children and adolescents with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid

### Unadjuvanted Vaccine

Category	Dosing Recommendation
Pregnant women	1 dose of unadjuvanted vaccine, now that it is available.  Note: Previously, when unadjuvanted vaccine was not available, adjuvanted vaccine was offered to pregnant women and is also safe.

*Adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Arepanrix™ Product Information Leaflet.*