



Youth Questions and Answers about the H1N1 Vaccine

Here are some questions we're hearing from youth. We hope these answers are helpful. Please ask a Public Health nurse if you still have questions when you get to your school clinic.

Is H1N1 really as big a deal as everyone's making it out to be?

You be the judge. The H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of pandemic influenza which is different than the seasonal flu. People have no natural immunity to protect against this virus. The H1N1 flu virus emerged in April 2009 and it is affecting more young and healthy people than the regular seasonal flu, which normally affects seniors and young children. People with underlying medical conditions and pregnant women may be at a greater risk for severe illness.

This flu season (from September until now), Nova Scotia has had:

- 739 lab-confirmed H1N1 cases (as of Nov. 28)
- 255 hospitalizations for H1N1 (as of Nov. 28)
- 6 H1N1-related deaths (as of Dec. 3)

Are there side effects of getting the H1N1 vaccine?

Side effects are usually mild, and some people don't experience any at all. Side effects could include:

- Tenderness/soreness, redness or swelling around the spot where you were vaccinated (upper arm). Every person is different. Some people will have little or no tenderness, redness or swelling, and others may experience more.
- Fever, tiredness and muscle aches.

In very rare cases, some people may have an allergic reaction to an ingredient in the vaccine, just like they might have an allergic reaction to a type of food or something else. If they have a severe reaction, our Public Health nurses are trained to respond quickly to treat them. Severe allergic reactions, which are very rare, would likely happen within a few minutes of being vaccinated. That's why we ask you to stay for 15 minutes after your vaccination.

Has anyone died from getting the H1N1 vaccine?

No. To date, no deaths have been attributed to H1N1 vaccination, despite over 65 million doses having been given world wide.

Can I get H1N1 from getting the vaccine?

No. The H1N1 vaccine does not contain the live virus. It is impossible to get H1N1 from the vaccine.

Remember, it takes about 10 days for your body to build up immunity to H1N1 after getting the vaccine. So, it's still possible to get the H1N1 flu within a few days after getting the vaccine. That's why people sometimes think they might have gotten the flu from the vaccine.

What is Guillain-Barré Syndrome and could I get it from the H1N1 vaccine?

What is Guillain-Barré Syndrome?

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (pronounced: ghee-LAN bah-RAY) is a very rare illness that exists around the world. It comes on very quickly and can cause weakness or paralysis. In some cases, people experience only mild symptoms, such as tingling. Others experience more serious symptoms, including weakness in the arms and legs. Most people recover fully from Guillain-Barré Syndrome.

What causes Guillain-Barré Syndrome?

Guillain-Barré Syndrome is caused by a type of bacteria that can be carried in food, causing diarrhea. Guillain-Barré Syndrome has also been linked to respiratory (breathing) infections like the seasonal flu or H1N1, and some surgery.

How many cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome are there in Canada every year?

There are between 600 and 700 cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome reported every year in Canada. About 30 of these cases are in Nova Scotia.

Who does Guillain-Barré Syndrome usually affect?

Guillain-Barré Syndrome is most commonly reported among people over age 50, and is very rare among youth.

Is there a risk of getting Guillain-Barré Syndrome from the H1N1 vaccination?

The risk of getting Guillain-Barré Syndrome after any flu vaccine is about one in a million. There is a greater risk of getting Guillain-Barré Syndrome from being sick with the flu than from getting a flu vaccine.

I saw a video on YouTube of a girl who says she got a disease called dystonia and could only walk backwards after getting the seasonal flu shot. Is this true?

Websites, including YouTube, allow anyone to pose as an expert or newsmaker. It can be frustrating or confusing when you are looking for information or answers to your questions.

The girl in the video claims to have a disease called dystonia. There have been no reported cases of dystonia as a result of flu vaccination in Canada. Even in the US,

some experts do not agree that this person's case is consistent with the diagnosis of dystonia (which means: it doesn't appear to be a typical case of dystonia). Here are two sites with a different point of view:

- <http://www.theness.com/neurologicablog/?p=1195>
- <http://blogs.consumerreports.org/health/2009/11/video-of-flu-shot-cheerleader-is-misleading-.html>

I've already had the flu. Do I need to get the H1N1 vaccine?

Unless you had a lab-confirmed case of H1N1, you should be vaccinated. It's possible you had another virus. Even if you had H1N1, there is no harm in being vaccinated.

I'm afraid of needles. What should I do?

Many people are afraid of needles. Our nurses are trained to help make vaccination as comfortable as possible for you. Here are a couple of things you can do to help prepare yourself:

- Take deep breaths starting from your belly. This can help to relax your body.
- When the nurse vaccinates you, she'll probably instruct you to relax your arm. This might seem difficult when you are feeling tense! It can help to let your arm hang behind you like an empty coat sleeve. Or, think of it as a rag doll!
- If you are really nervous and have fainted before after needles, the nurse may ask you to lay down. Sometimes, a cold pack on the back of your neck while getting the vaccine can help too.

Tell your nurse if you feel nervous about getting your needle. She'll help you through it.

Do I need my parent or guardian's permission to get the H1N1 vaccine?

If you are in grades 10 to 12, you ***do not*** need your parent or guardian's permission to get the H1N1 vaccine. You can consent for yourself. You will be provided with information about the vaccine, and will be given a chance to ask questions. Please ask any questions you have, no matter how small. It's important that you make an informed decision about getting vaccinated. Some students may feel more comfortable talking to their parent or guardian about getting the vaccine before making a decision. If that's the case, we encourage you to do this.

If you are in grade 9 or below, and you receive the vaccine at a school-based clinic, you will need to bring a consent form signed by your parent or guardian to be vaccinated. These forms are available on the Halifax Regional School Board website at: <http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/news/H1N1/consent-form.pdf>

What do I do if I'm pregnant?

There are two types of vaccine – one that includes something called an adjuvant (a booster) that kicks the immune system into gear more quickly – and one without (called unadjuvanted). When the H1N1 vaccine program first started, people who

were pregnant were told to get the unadjuvanted vaccine. Since then, both types of vaccine have been shown to be safe for those who are pregnant. The decision is up to you.

At your clinic, you will have the option of being vaccinated along with a large group or on your own. People who are nervous about being vaccinated, those who are pregnant (or think they could be) or those with health conditions or allergies, can meet with a nurse individually if they wish. You will be able to choose which type of vaccine you want.

Both types of vaccine are safe during pregnancy, so you don't need to worry that having the adjuvanted vaccine will hurt you or your unborn baby.

Should I be vaccinated if I have an egg allergy?

No. The vaccine contains egg white, so if you are allergic to eggs (which isn't the same as not liking eggs), you should not get the H1N1 vaccine at your school clinic. You can talk to your family doctor about getting a referral to an allergist, who can determine if it is safe to give you the vaccine.

What do I need to bring with me to the vaccination clinic?

If you have a health card, please bring it with you. If you don't have one, don't worry. We will vaccinate you without it.

If possible, please bring your postal code. This helps us to know which communities we've reached with our vaccine. If you don't know your postal code, don't worry. We will vaccinate you without it.

Wear short sleeves if possible. This makes it easier for the nurse to reach your upper arm, where the vaccination is given.

What should I do to prepare for the vaccination clinic?

Try to eat a good breakfast, lunch or snack before the clinic (depending on the time of your clinic).

What can I expect at the vaccination clinic?

Before you are vaccinated, someone will tell you about H1N1 and the vaccine. You will also be asked to fill in a form with your personal information, including name, address, date of birth and gender.

You will have the choice to be in a group with other students for vaccination or to see a nurse on your own. Students who have special health needs, egg allergies, are nervous of needles or are pregnant may want to see a nurse on their own.

Getting the needle is quick, and similar to other vaccinations you may have had at school.

After you've been vaccinated, you'll be asked to sit in the recovery area for 15 minutes.

Why do I have to stick around after my vaccination?

We ask that you stay in our recovery area for 15 minutes after the vaccination in case you have an allergic reaction. Severe allergic reactions (which are very rare) would likely happen within a few minutes of being vaccinated. If you were to have a severe allergic reaction, our Public Health nurses are trained to respond quickly and treat you.

Will I need to get the H1N1 vaccine again next year?

Because H1N1 is a new vaccine, experts don't yet know how long it will protect against H1N1. It is possible that the H1N1 vaccine could become similar to the seasonal flu vaccine, with yearly vaccinations. We will need to wait for research results before we know for sure.

Where can I get more information?

There are lots of options. You can:

- Ask a health professional you might know – like the Youth Health Centre coordinator for your school, your family doctor or a walk-in clinic.
- Call a health professional at the province's health information line at 811 (it's like 911, but with an 8 – it's free and confidential)
- Or search for information online – we recommend these sites to start:
 - www.fightflu.ca (Public Health Agency of Canada)
 - www.gov.ns.ca/H1N1 (Nova Scotia government)
 - www.cdha.nshealth.ca/H1N1Updates (Capital Health)
 - www.iwk.nshealth.ca (IWK Health Centre)
 - www.who.int (World Health Organization)
- Look for Facebook or Twitter sites of organizations you trust. (A few of the organizations above are on Facebook and Twitter, too.)