

H1N1 INFLUENZA UPDATE

H1N1 vaccinations begin for the general public at Prairieland Park on Wednesday, November 25th. The information below about H1N1 myths comes to us from the Saskatoon Health Region. We encourage you to read this information and make an informed decision about vaccination.

H1N1 Myths

Within Saskatoon Health Region H1N1 immunization services open to the public on Wednesday, November 25. Have you been immunized yet? If not, maybe it is because of some of the information you have heard or read about. If this is the case consider the **following misconceptions** about H1N1:

Not many people in the Saskatoon Health Region have been ill with H1N1.

In the last three weeks we have seen high rates of influenza like illness and increased numbers of patients who have received medical care, especially emergency room and critical care services. The good news is that H1N1 flu has been mild. However, a significant number of people have been very ill and there have been a few deaths. Healthy young adults seem to get much sicker from H1N1 than from the seasonal flu.

For most people the H1N1 flu or seasonal flu is not very serious.

About 5 million Canadians get sick with the flu each year or about 1 in every 6 people. If you do get sick you may be off work for up to a week and feel poorly for up to a month. About 1.5 million workdays are lost each year with the estimated cost of lost productivity at \$1 billion!

I never get sick so I don't need the shot.

You may be ill and not know it. About 1 in 5 people can have the virus and have no symptoms. These people can spread the virus to others including people that may be vulnerable to the flu. These may include infants, the elderly and people with underlying health problems.

The last time I had a flu shot, it gave me the flu.

The flu shot may give you a sore arm or make you feel achy for a day or two but it can not give you the flu. This is because the vaccine is made with dead virus and tricks your body into thinking it has the flu. Anyone who gets the flu after getting the shot were either coming down with the flu already, have another illness or caught the circulating flu by coincidence.

I heard that 20% of people in the Saskatoon Health Region are already immunized for H1N1 so I don't need to get immunized.

A 20 % coverage rate will not completely prevent the transmission of H1N1 because up to 60% of the community will be unprotected or susceptible to H1N1. Every vaccinated person increases the chances that more people will remain healthy and reduce the transmission of the disease to family, friends and coworkers.

It's better to get the H1N1 virus as the symptoms are mild, instead of being vaccinated.

No. Some people expose themselves or family members to the virus on purpose in order to develop immunity on their own. Every person responds to H1N1 differently. For some it may be like the regular flu and in others it can cause serious illness and even death.

I have a fish allergy so I can't get the H1N1 shot because the vaccine has fish oil in it.

The adjuvanted vaccine contains squalene which is extracted from shark liver oil. The oil is highly purified and the purification process includes a step which destroys the allergenic proteins. There is no warning about fish allergies on the labeling for either of the two squalene containing H1N1 vaccines approved for use (a European one made with Novartis and the GSK vaccine being used in Canada). We are recommending it for use in people with fish allergies.

I read that the mercury in Thimerosal in the H1N1 vaccine is harmful.

Thimerosal is an effective preservative that has been used for many years in vaccines worldwide. It contains a small amount of ethyl mercury. Its safety has been studied in depth for several years. The amount of mercury in a flu vaccine is less than the daily limit recommended. For example, a can of tuna fish has more mercury than the Thimerosal in the vaccine.

My child is due for the second H1N1 shot. I need to get this done now.

Some children will need two doses:

- all children at least 6 months of age and less than 3 years of age
- children from 3 years of age and less than 10 who have high risk medical conditions

The second dose should be at least 21 days after the first one and in normal influenza season the doses can be months apart. The first dose of adjuvanted vaccine does provide a high level of protection. Second doses will be available starting Monday, December 7.

It's too late to get immunized.

No, it is never too late! There will be vaccine for any individual that want's it. You can still be immunized for H1N1 at any of the public clinics throughout the health region. Check www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca for the listing of clinic locations.

Stop the spread of H1N1...get immunized!! Check www.pandemic.cpha.ca, www.fightflu.ca and www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca for accurate information on H1N1.

Written by the Public Health Services H1N1 Incident Command Team. For more information, contact Public Health Services at 655-4620.