

# HEALTHCARE WORKERS AND H1N1 FLU VACCINE

## Why Vaccinate Healthcare Workers

- ✓ Healthcare workers are at risk of getting H1N1 disease. They are also at risk of spreading this disease to people at high risk of complications.

## Where to Access H1N1 Vaccine

- ✓ Health departments and hospitals are now offering H1N1 vaccine to health care workers with direct patient care responsibilities (especially those seeing lots of patients with or at risk for complications from H1N1 flu.) This includes EMS workers, inpatient and outpatient healthcare providers.

## What Formulations Can be Used in Health Care Workers

- ✓ The nasal spray is for anyone who is 2 – 49 years old, is otherwise healthy, and not pregnant.
- ✓ The flu shot can be given to anyone age 6 months and older. It is the preferred formulation for people who are pregnant or have underlying health conditions putting them at risk for flu complications (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, neurologic disease, diabetes, immunosuppression, etc.).
- ✓ Nasal spray can be used in healthcare workers who are 2 – 49 otherwise healthy and not pregnant, even if they care for young children, pregnant women, HIV patients, people with diabetes, newborns, etc.
- ✓ Healthcare workers do not need to wait after receiving flu vaccine (injectable or nasal spray) before returning to patient care (even if the patients are at risk of flu complications), with one exception. The one exception is a healthcare worker caring for patients so immunosuppressed that they have to remain in a specially designed environment to prevent exposure to other people. This is the kind of room found in bone marrow transplant units. These healthcare workers should wait 7 days after receiving nasal spray vaccine to return to that setting of care or should use the flu shot instead.
- ✓ H1N1 flu vaccines used in the US this year do not contain adjuvant. (An adjuvant potentiates the vaccine, enabling a small amount to go farther).

## Can Either Vaccine Cause the Flu?

- ✓ You cannot get the flu from either the flu shot or the nasal spray.

- ✓ Although the nasal spray is a live virus vaccine, it is “cold attenuated”. This means it is altered so that the virus can only replicate at temperatures found in the nasal passages. Thus it can replicate in the nose and trigger an immune response. If the virus gets in the blood stream or lower respiratory tract, however, it dies out, because these parts of the body are too hot for the virus to replicate. This is why it doesn’t cause systemic disease.
- ✓ It is rare that the nasal spray vaccine virus is transmitted from the person receiving the vaccine to another person (0.6 – 2.4 % in studies). When it does occur, it has not been shown to cause flu disease because of the fact that the vaccine virus is cold attenuated. That is why it is safe to use in contacts of people at increased risk of flu complications.

## **H1N1 Vaccine Safety**

- ✓ There is nothing new about the H1N1 flu vaccine other than the virus it protects against.
- ✓ H1N1 vaccines are made just the same way and by the same manufacturers as seasonal flu shots are.
- ✓ The H1N1 vaccine took the anticipated amount of time to make – 4 to 6 months. All regular quality control and quality assurance components of the flu vaccine manufacturing process were followed. In fact the H1N1 vaccine got more testing on safety and immunogenicity than is done on seasonal flu vaccines.
- ✓ Given it is made exactly the same, vaccine experts feel there is no reason to expect that the safety profile of H1N1 vaccine will be any different from that of seasonal flu vaccine – a vaccine used widely and safely for years. This is what clinical trials done in multiple countries have shown to date as well. Although none are expected, systems are in place to watch for any rare or unexpected events that might arise.
- ✓ **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), doctors specializing in public health, and other major medical bodies all recommend healthcare workers get vaccinated against H1N1 and Seasonal Flu. Learn more for yourself.**

## **For More Information**

- ✓ For more information, see the [CDC website on H1N1 vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/general.htm) at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/general.htm>
- ✓ For more information on H1N1 flu in West Virginia and for patient resources on “[When to Seek Care for Flu](#)” and “[Treating Flu](#)” see <http://www.wvdhhr.org> .