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H1N1 Vaccine: Myths and Realities

H1N1 influenza has certainly caused a firestorm of conversation, and with all the confusion, it can be tough to distinguish the facts from the rumors. To help clear up the misconceptions, www.flu.gov has created the following list of common myths along with the reality of each situation.

MYTH: “The federal government is running a mandatory vaccination campaign.”

REALITY: The federal government’s vaccination program for H1N1 flu is VOLUNTARY. Some hospitals and localities are requiring that health care workers get vaccinated for the flu, but that is a local decision. The Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have included health care workers as one of the top priority groups to receive the vaccine, and several places across the country have begun offering H1N1 vaccination to this at-risk group.

The petition found on a few selected internet sites protesting the federal government’s “mandatory” vaccination campaign is simply false in its claims. Vaccination is highly recommended as a protective measure against the flu, but is absolutely voluntary.

MYTH: “It costs too much money to get an H1N1 vaccine.”

REALITY: The federal government has purchased the H1N1 vaccine and is providing it to states free of charge. This is different in many places from the seasonal flu vaccine.

Public vaccination clinics (sponsored by local health departments at schools or other places) will offer the vaccine at no charge. Some private providers may charge a small fee to administer the vaccine, but cost should not be a barrier to getting immunized.

Many people and businesses have stepped up to the public health challenge we all face and are working together for the overall public good to make this vaccine free – or at least affordable – for all those who want it.

MYTH: “You need to get two doses of the H1N1 vaccine, and it takes a month between each dose.”

REALITY: There is very positive news that has come out of the clinical trials being run by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the flu vaccine manufacturers. The H1N1 vaccine is a really good match with the H1N1 virus currently circulating across the country, and healthy adults and children 10 and older will need only one dose of the vaccine.

Though scientists initially thought that two doses might be required, information from clinical trials has since demonstrated the H1N1 vaccine works faster than expected and effectively combats against the H1N1 virus, which is making millions of Americans sick.



It's also fine to get the seasonal flu shot and the H1N1 shot at the same time. However, if you get the nasal spray form of the vaccine, you need to wait three to four weeks before getting another nasal spray vaccine.

MYTH: "This new vaccine is not safe and is untested."

REALITY: Clinical trials conducted by the NIH and the vaccine manufacturers have shown that the new H1N1 vaccine is both safe and effective. The FDA has licensed it – there have been no safety shortcuts.

The H1N1 vaccine is produced exactly the same way the seasonal flu vaccine is produced every year. It is simply a new virus strain. In fact, had H1N1 struck this country earlier than this spring, the H1N1 strain probably would have been included as part of this year's seasonal flu shot.

Millions of Americans get the seasonal flu vaccine each year without any problems. Still, understanding that some Americans have concerns about "new" vaccines, the NIH and the vaccine manufacturers have conducted more rigorous tests on the H1N1 vaccine than they do on other flu vaccines, and there have been no red flags from these clinical trials.

Also, the CDC has stepped up

surveillance efforts to track the H1N1 vaccine and any possible adverse events. Since it is so closely related to the seasonal flu vaccine, no serious side effects are expected. However, all the necessary steps to promote and monitor safety are being taken.

Top doctors and scientists believe the risk of the flu, especially for pregnant women, children and people with underlying health conditions, is higher than any risk that might come from getting the H1N1 vaccine.

MYTH: "I got an e-mail that tells the story of someone who got a flu shot and had a miscarriage two days later."

REALITY: Tragically, every day in the U.S., people suffer from heart attacks, miscarriages, strokes and other health-related events. Some result in serious illness, even death.

For example, there are approximately 8,700 deaths from heart attacks, 140 cases of Guillain-Barre and 14,000 miscarriages in the U.S. every week. These events are no more common among people who have received seasonal flu vaccine than in people who have not.

The CDC has received no reports of serious adverse events from people who have received the H1N1 vaccine to date in the clinical trials or in the few places across the country where

vaccinations have begun. A strong new surveillance system has been created that will allow the tracking of adverse reactions and quick analysis of whether there is a link to the vaccine.

MYTH: "A 14-year-old girl in the United Kingdom died after being vaccinated with the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine."

REALITY: British scientists report this particular event was unrelated to the HPV vaccine and definitely unrelated to the H1N1 flu vaccine.

Public health officials in the UK have said the safety of the HPV vaccine was not in question, and no link can currently be made between the girl's death and the vaccine. According to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency – their counterpart to the FDA – the girl had a rare and serious underlying medical condition that was likely to have caused her death.

Licensed seasonal flu vaccines have a long track record of safety based on use in hundreds of millions of people. H1N1 vaccines are being manufactured by the same methods as the seasonal flu vaccines administered every year.

Source: www.flu.gov

What about eating pork? Or drinking water and swimming pools?

If properly handled and cooked, eating pork is perfectly healthy. In addition, chlorinated tap water and swimming pool water do not put you at risk for contracting the flu virus.