

VACCINE SAFETY

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent disease. It helps the immune system recognize and control the germs that cause diseases. Vaccines have been used to help protect Manitobans from disease for decades and are now commonly given for seasonal flu, mumps, measles, polio, diphtheria and tetanus. All vaccines go through a federal process that reviews safety and effectiveness data before issuing a licence for use.

Flu shots may cause side effects that usually last for a few days but may last longer. Local reactions are common and normal and may last for a few days including:

- soreness,
- swelling, or
- redness at the injection site.

Other reactions can include fever, chills, headache, feeling tired or myalgia (tenderness or pain in the muscles). Rare side effects can include Guillain-Barré syndrome, a form of paralysis that is usually temporary and is estimated to occur at one in every million vaccinations. Other rare side effects include allergic reactions (which can be life-threatening), severe pain or swelling.

When considering the value of vaccines, it is important to look at risks, benefits and costs. Effective vaccination programs in Canada and around the world have limited the spread of many diseases and provide protection against illnesses that are still very serious or deadly for people.

About the H1N1 flu shot

The H1N1 flu shot has been through a federal process to review its safety and effectiveness. It has been developed to provide protection against H1N1 flu and is not expected to be effective against other seasonal varieties of flu.

Flu shots do not use a live virus to help build immunity so H1N1 flu can't be caught from being vaccinated. Like other flu shots, the H1N1 vaccine can provide protection within approximately two weeks following immunization.

For children 12 months and older and for adults, the H1N1 flu shot is usually given with a needle into the muscle of the upper arm. For infants (six to 11 months of age), the vaccine is usually given in the upper thigh.

As with any medical procedure, the H1N1 flu shot may not be for everyone. The H1N1 flu vaccine is not licensed for infants under six months of age. People who are allergic to eggs or other influenza vaccine components should not be vaccinated. The H1N1 vaccine is also not recommended for anyone who has had a lab-confirmed diagnosis of H1N1 flu.

Medical experts recommend that children between the ages of six months and 10 years should be given two H1N1 flu shots three weeks apart to provide immunity. Each shot will have half the adult dose of vaccine.

In November, an unadjuvanted shot for pregnant women is expected to be available. Women who are pregnant can wait until that shot arrives or they can talk to their health-care provider about the possibility of getting the adjuvanted shot earlier. Adjuvants are a booster found in many vaccines and are made up of natural ingredients including water, oil and vitamin E. Adjuvants are used in many vaccines in Canada, but have not been used extensively with pregnant women.

Seasonal flu and pneumococcal shots may also be available during H1N1 flu clinics.

All immunizations, including the H1N1 flu shot, are voluntary in Manitoba and given with informed consent. However, it is important to remember that vaccines help protect people from disease and protect others who cannot be immunized because they have certain health conditions.

For more information about the importance of immunization and the H1N1 flu shot, visit an upcoming flu shot clinic or speak with a public-health nurse. More information about vaccine safety is also available from the Public Health Agency of Canada at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.