

H1N1 (Swine) Flu Vaccine: What Parents Should Know

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Are you concerned about H1N1 flu, and the safety of the vaccine?

Recent chatter on the Internet has convinced some parents that the H1N1 flu vaccine is not safe. Others are concerned about the new strain flu, but fear the vaccine has not been properly tested. The vaccine has, in fact, been tested and is expected to be as safe as seasonal flu vaccines which have a very good track record and are given to millions of people each year.

Overall, physicians believe the benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the minimal risks—especially for young people between six months and 24 years old, who have not been exposed to this flu strain and do not have natural immunity.

Parents debating whether or not to immunize their children from H1N1 can consider these facts:

The H1N1 flu virus is new, and although it has been a mild illness for most people, young otherwise healthy people are at greater risk for life-threatening complications. This is why young people under age 24 and pregnant women were among the first groups to get the vaccine.

H1N1 flu spreads very quickly, especially in school and daycare settings. This leaves children with asthma, diabetes and other chronic health conditions at risk. As more children are vaccinated, this will help reduce the spread of H1N1.

Vaccine complications are extremely rare. Millions of people have received seasonal flu shots each year without incident. The H1N1 vaccine is produced and manufactured using the same processes used for seasonal flu. Few reactions have been reported other than soreness in the arm or mild aches or fever for a day or two. Claims that vaccines have caused autism have been rigorously reviewed by scientific groups, including the Institute of Medicine, and no cause and effect link has been found.

The H1N1 vaccine does not cause flu. The vaccine can be administered through a shot containing an inactivated virus, or a through a nasal spray, which contains a weakened live virus. Neither vaccine type can give you the flu.

A flu diagnosis or test does not ensure immunity. When a wave of flu hit locally, doctors diagnosed H1N1 flu based on symptoms or office tests, which often produce false positives. Since many viruses produce similar symptoms, parents cannot be certain that their children have built up immunity to H1N1 based on an office diagnosis.

Some people should not get vaccinated. The H1N1 vaccine should not be given to people who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs, those who have previously had a severe reaction to a flu shot or people who have developed Guillian-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks of getting a flu shot. The vaccine is not being administered to children less than 6 months old. People who are ill with a fever should wait to be immunized.