

Flu season 2009-2010: Something old, something new

This upcoming fall and winter will be a little different.

Every year, somewhere between five and 20% of Americans become ill with seasonal flu. In addition to seasonal flu, health experts expect that H1N1 influenza (swine flu) will circulate widely this fall and winter.

Since H1N1 influenza appeared this spring, health officials have been closely monitoring the disease and planning for the expected second wave of H1N1 influenza this fall. The severity of H1N1 illness is expected to be similar to the seasonal flu and health experts believe large numbers of people may become infected and seek medical care.

Pregnant women, children and individuals with some underlying health conditions appear to be at higher risk for severe illness.

Drug manufacturers are producing an H1N1 vaccine that would protect against H1N1 influenza. While federal officials think there will be enough H1N1 vaccine for everyone who wants it, they recommend people at highest risk and in the following groups are prioritized when vaccine becomes available:

- Pregnant women
- Children and young adults 6 months to 24 years of age
- Persons 25-64 years old who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from flu (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma)
- Household members and caregivers of children younger than 6 months in age
- Healthcare workers and emergency medical service providers

While H1N1 flu and regular seasonal flu can be very serious, individuals, families, and organizations can take steps to prevent illness and prepare for this upcoming flu season. People in high-risk groups should make every effort to get the H1N1 vaccine. The H1N1 influenza vaccine does not protect against seasonal flu; Public Health recommends that seniors and others at risk for seasonal flu also get the seasonal flu vaccine.

Here is some information and tips to help prepare for the upcoming flu season:

Get a H1N1 influenza vaccine. In King County H1N1 vaccine will be distributed using the existing networks of healthcare agencies, Public Health

clinics, private providers and pharmacies. Individuals and families can get their H1N1 influenza vaccine at the same place they get the seasonal flu vaccine. **Get your seasonal flu vaccine.** The H1N1 influenza vaccine does not replace seasonal flu vaccine. It is important that people in high risk groups for seasonal flu get their seasonal influenza shot so that they are protected. Older individuals are at higher risk for seasonal flu and Public Health recommends they get the flu vaccine every years.

Mark your calendar. The exact timeline for H1N1 vaccine are not known yet, but vaccines may be available in mid-October. The seasonal flu vaccine is expected to be available before the H1N1 vaccine. The H1N1 vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine can be taken together if necessary, but experts encourage those at risk to get the seasonal flu vaccine now.

Plan at work and home. Organizations and businesses can review protocol for asking sick staff to stay at home, and develop ways to support staff that are ill, caring for ill family members, or recovering from the flu. Families with school aged children can start talking to other families and neighbors about alternative child care plans if children are sick with flu, or if schools or day cares are closed.

For more information and future updates about H1N1 influenza (swine flu), visit Public Health - Seattle & King County at www.kingcounty.gov/health/h1n1.