

October 9, 2009

Dear Kalamazoo County Resident,

The Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department is aware that as the 2009 – 2010 influenza season progresses, many questions regarding the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu vaccine have arisen over the past few weeks. We have all been inundated with information about H1N1 influenza to the point where it has become confusing. The following information is intended to answer any questions you may have about the seasonal flu and the H1N1 influenza vaccine.

What is the single best way to stay protected against the flu virus?

The influenza vaccine is the single best way to prevent you from getting sick with the influenza virus. However, covering your coughs and sneezes and frequently washing your hands will also help keep you healthy.

How many flu vaccines do I need this year?

You should receive 2 different vaccines this year:

1. The seasonal vaccine, which will prevent you from getting the seasonal flu virus.
2. The 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 vaccine, which will protect you from contracting the 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 virus (commonly called the “swineflu”).

The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus is not the same as previous or current seasonal influenza viruses. Therefore, seasonal influenza vaccine does not provide protection against the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus.

Where should I get the vaccines?

Contact your health care provider or the Health and Community Services Department to receive the seasonal flu and the H1N1 influenza vaccines.

Is the 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 vaccine safe?

The 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 vaccine is manufactured and tested using the same processes used for the seasonal vaccine. Many millions of doses of seasonal vaccine have been distributed every year for many years, and seasonal vaccines have a well-established safety profile. Vaccine safety is always monitored as part of the federal vaccination program.

Can I get both vaccines at the same time?

It depends. Both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 vaccines are available as inactivated (as a shot in the arm) and live (as a nasal mist sprayed in the nose) formulations. The existing recommendations are that two inactivated vaccines can be administered at any time before, after, or at the same visit as each other. If a person is eligible and prefers the nasal mist or live formulation of seasonal and 2009 H1N1 vaccine, these vaccines should be separated by a minimum of four weeks.

Can anyone get the live (as a nasal mist sprayed in the nose) type of vaccine?

No. Only healthy persons between the ages of 2 and 49 years of age can receive the live vaccine.

When should I get the vaccines?

Both vaccines are available now. The sooner you get your vaccines the sooner you will be protected from getting influenza. The H1N1 vaccine has been prioritized to specific target populations. In the near future, there will be a sufficient supply of vaccine available and anyone wanting to receive the vaccine may do so.

I've heard that certain groups of people should receive the 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 vaccine first. Who are they and why?

The 2009 novel influenza A H1N1 vaccine is quickly being produced and distributed to meet the needs of all people. However, certain people are more likely to suffer from the complications of influenza. Therefore, it is critical that these people receive the vaccine first. The following groups of people are recommended to receive the vaccine as it first becomes available:

1. **Pregnant women** because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated;
2. **Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age** because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination of those in close contact with infants younger than 6 months old might help protect infants by “cocooning” them from the virus;
3. **Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel** because infections among healthcare workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients. Also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity;
4. **All people from 6 months through 24 years of age**
 - **Children from 6 months through 18 years of age** because cases of 2009 H1N1 influenza have been seen in children who are in close contact with each other in school and day care settings, which increases the likelihood of disease spread, and
 - **Young adults 19 through 24 years of age** because many cases of 2009 H1N1 influenza have been seen in these healthy young adults and they often live, work, and study in close proximity, and they are a frequently mobile population; and,
5. **Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.**

Sincerely,

Linda Vail Buzas, MPA
Director, Health Officer
Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department