
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
BC Centre for Disease Control

H1N1 PANDEMIC VACCINE APPROVED, TIMING CONFIRMED

VICTORIA – Following today’s approval by Health Canada regulators, the pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine will be made available to British Columbians beginning the week of Oct. 26, announced Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

“Now that the H1N1 flu vaccine has been approved, I encourage British Columbians to get immunized and protect themselves against this novel flu virus,” said Kendall. “Even if some of the population has already contracted H1N1 so far, we know that most British Columbians have not been infected yet and can still benefit from receiving the vaccine to protect themselves.”

The first batch of vaccine has arrived in British Columbia and is currently being distributed around the province to regional health authorities, based on population numbers in each region. Beginning Monday, it will be available first to those people who would benefit most from immunization: individuals under 65 years of age with chronic disease, pregnant women and individuals – including First Nations people – living in remote or isolated communities. These groups are at high-risk for suffering complications from pandemic H1N1 infection.

“B.C. will receive the H1N1 vaccine shipments in phases. Our plan is to first immunize those individuals considered to be at most risk to ensure that more vulnerable groups are protected,” said Chong. “During this time, we would ask that those people who are not at highest risk to wait until mid-November to get immunized when we receive our full orders.”

The pandemic H1N1 vaccine is an adjuvanted vaccine. Adjuvants are compounds that boost the immune system’s response to vaccine, allowing smaller doses to be used per person. A version of the H1N1 vaccine without adjuvant will also be available in B.C. beginning the second week of November. While the unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine is recommended for pregnant women, the adjuvanted version, available early next week, is approved for everyone who wants to protect themselves from this pandemic.

Once clinics begin next week, British Columbians who fall into the high-risk groups listed above who need and want the H1N1 vaccine, and for whom the seasonal flu shot is also recommended, will be able to receive both at the same time.

“The national expert committees that are providing guidance on the use of the pandemic vaccines have recommended that giving seasonal and pandemic vaccines together is not expected to affect the immune response to either one. This is in keeping with what we know about almost all other vaccines.” said Dr. Monika Naus, director of immunization at the BC Centre for Disease Control, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. “By getting the seasonal and pandemic vaccines together, the risk from both sorts of influenza can be reduced at the same time.”

When B.C.’s seasonal influenza campaign launched in mid-October, the seasonal flu shot was only recommended for seniors and those living in long-term care facilities.

“While I can understand there may be some confusion in the public about how and when to get vaccinated, and with which vaccine, this decision to offer the H1N1 and seasonal vaccines together addresses these concerns,” said Kendall. “B.C.’s initial recommendation to delay the seasonal vaccine campaign for everyone under the age of 65 was made using the best available evidence and before the pandemic vaccine was available. Now that pandemic vaccine is here, we can give protection against both seasonal and pandemic viruses at the same time”

For more information on the H1N1 flu vaccine, visit www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1. To find where you can get your H1N1 and/or seasonal flu shot, visit the Flu Clinic Locator at www.ImmunizeBC.ca or contact your local public health unit. More locations will be added as they are confirmed.

BACKGROUND

WHAT VACCINE YOU SHOULD GET, AND WHEN

Now:

Those people 65 and over and those living in long-term care homes are currently eligible to receive only the seasonal flu vaccine.

Week of Oct. 26:

Starting the week of Oct. 26, the people who will benefit most from pandemic H1N1 immunization, and who need and want to get vaccinated, will be able to receive that vaccine should they choose to do so. These groups include:

- Persons under the age of 65 with chronic conditions.
- Pregnant women.
- Persons living in remote and isolated settings or communities (including all First Nations people living on-reserve).

People who fall into these groups AND for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time.

People who do not fall into these groups are asked to put off receiving the H1N1 vaccine for a few weeks to allow those at most risk to get their vaccine first.

Week of Nov. 2:

Starting the week of Nov. 2, the people eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine will expand to include the following groups:

- All initial groups.
- Children 6 months to less than 5 years of age.
- Health-care workers (including all health-care system workers involved with the pandemic response or delivery of essential health services).
- Household contacts and care providers of infants less than 6 months of age, and persons who are immunocompromised.

People who fall into these groups AND for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time.

Mid- to late-November (when notified):

Beginning three or four weeks later, everyone else who needs and wants the H1N1 vaccine will be recommended to receive it. Public notification will happen at this time so that everyone is aware the vaccine is available to them.

Again, those people normally recommended to receive the seasonal flu vaccine will be able to get both shots at this time.

Adjuvanted vs. unadjuvanted vaccines:

The pandemic H1N1 vaccine is an adjuvanted vaccine. Adjuvants are compounds that boost the immune system's response to vaccine, allowing smaller doses to be used per person. A version of the H1N1 vaccine without adjuvant will also be available in B.C. beginning the second week of November.

While the unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine is recommended for pregnant women, the adjuvanted version, available earlier next week, is approved for everyone who wants to protect themselves from this pandemic. Pregnant women in the second half of pregnancy are among those at highest risk of severe outcomes from the pandemic H1N1 virus.

Since B.C. is experiencing epidemic levels of the H1N1 virus now, pregnant women in second half of pregnancy are advised not to wait until November for unadjuvanted vaccine, but to get immunized now with the adjuvanted version.

To find out where you can get your H1N1 and/or seasonal flu shot, visit the Flu Clinic Locator at www.ImmunizeBC.ca or contact your local public health unit. Once the H1N1 flu vaccine arrives, more locations will be added as they are confirmed.

BACKGROUND

CO-ADMINISTRATION OF H1N1 AND SEASONAL FLU VACCINES

After extensive consideration at the national level, B.C. and the Provincial Health Officer are recommending that those British Columbians who normally receive the seasonal flu vaccine now be able to receive that vaccine at the same time as their H1N1 shot.

National review and examination of both the sequential and the simultaneous administration of the pandemic H1N1 vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine have determined that administering the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines at the same time is unlikely to impair the immune response to either one.

B.C.'s initial recommendation to delay the seasonal vaccine campaign for everyone under the age of 65 was made based on the best available evidence and before pandemic vaccine was available.

Now that pandemic vaccine is available, B.C. has updated the vaccine administration recommendations to ensure those who need to be protected against both the H1N1 and seasonal flu strains of viruses can accomplish that in the shortest period of time.

As well, co-administration will allow B.C. to leverage and maximize the province's clinic and public health resources during the largest immunization campaign in the history of this province.

To find out where you can get your H1N1 and/or seasonal flu shot, visit the Flu Clinic Locator at www.ImmunizeBC.ca or contact your local public health unit. Once the H1N1 flu vaccine arrives, more locations will be added as they are confirmed.

BACKGROUND

H1N1 VACCINE BY THE NUMBERS

223,500: The number of doses already in B.C. and ready for administration starting Oct. 26.

Four: The number of trucks that drove the vaccine to B.C.

351: The number of large shoe boxes required to hold all the vaccine doses.

4,174,149: The total number of doses of adjuvanted vaccine that B.C. has ordered.

216,000: The number of doses of unadjuvanted vaccine that B.C. will receive in the second week of November – the province’s entire order.

Two: The number of half-doses children under 10 will need to receive, spread three weeks apart.

1.4 million: The number of doses of seasonal vaccine the Province purchases on a yearly basis to administer those in high-risk groups.

0-6: The ages, in months, of children who should not receive the H1N1 vaccine.

Four – six: The time, in weeks, in which B.C. expects all British Columbians who need and want the vaccine will be able to receive it.

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