

MEDICATION GUIDE FOR THE PANDEMIC (H1N1) 2009 INFLUENZA VACCINE

This medication guide provides information about the Influenza A (H1N1-2009) pandemic influenza vaccine, who should receive the vaccine, and the common side effects to look out for.

The H1N1 vaccine has a similar safety profile as seasonal flu vaccine, which has a good track record. So far, the H1N1 vaccine has not been associated with any unexpected adverse events. The general consensus is that any such serious adverse events would be rare. Monitoring on the efficacy and safety of the vaccines is on-going.

Clinical trials in children are still ongoing. The health authorities will review the use of the vaccine in children as soon as information on its efficacy and safety in children is available.

What is the vaccine for? Who should receive the vaccine?

Getting the vaccination is an effective way to build immunity and protect yourself against the H1N1 virus.

The new strain of Influenza A (H1N1), though known to be contagious, has not been reported to cause severe illness in the majority of patients infected by it.

However, individuals with underlying chronic conditions (e.g. diabetes, heart diseases, kidney failure, lung diseases, neuromuscular disorders), low immunity and pregnant women may be at a higher risk of complications like respiratory and heart failure from pneumonia. If you belong to any of these high-risk groups, you should consider getting the vaccination.

Who should not get the vaccine or should wait to receive one?

If you had a severe allergic reaction after a dose of seasonal influenza vaccine, or are allergic to high protein food (like egg or chicken protein), please inform your doctor, who will advise you if you should receive the vaccine.

You should have fully recovered from moderate or severe illnesses before receiving the vaccine.

What should I tell my doctor before my vaccination?

You should inform your doctor if you:

- Have a fever or an infection. (If you have a fever or feeling unwell, you should postpone your vaccination);
- Have received any vaccination (whether seasonal flu vaccine or any other vaccine) before;
- Have been infected by H1N1 influenza virus before;
- Are allergic to any medicines or vaccines, or food (eg, high protein food like egg or chicken protein);
- Have other illnesses;
- Are taking other medicines;
- Are pregnant.

Will I get immediate immunity after vaccination? How long will I be protected for?

Immunity after vaccination varies from person to person, but you will generally start producing the antibodies that provide protection after two weeks. It will protect the

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majority of people for at least 6 months to a year. It is important to remember that no vaccine provides 100% protection in every person vaccinated.

This vaccine only protects you against the H1N1 2009 influenza virus. You can still be infected by other seasonal influenza viruses. Please discuss with your doctor if you would also like to take your seasonal influenza vaccine.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

The common side effects of influenza vaccinations such as the H1N1 vaccines include pain, redness or swelling at the site of injection. These side effects usually resolve in a few days.

Occasionally, vaccines may cause some other "generalised" side effects such as fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, or a rash - these side effects may be caused by the vaccine or may be symptoms of a coincidental illness (eg, viral infection). Again, these side effects usually resolve in a few days. Some patients may also experience febrile seizures (fever accompanied by fits).

Very rarely, vaccines may cause severe allergic reactions (or anaphylaxis). Patients may feel severe anxiety, itchy skin rash, swelling of the lips and face or difficulty in breathing. There have been reports overseas of a possible association between influenza vaccinations and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a rare and sometimes severe condition affecting the body's nerves. However, the link with vaccination (including with this vaccine) is not definite.

How can I relieve the discomfort of common side effects of vaccination such as fever, pain and swelling?

For relief of fever and possible pain from the vaccination, you may wish to:

- Take paracetamol.
- Place a cold, wet cloth over the injection site for pain, redness, or swelling.

When do I know that a side effect is serious and I need to see a doctor?

Please see a doctor if you experience any of the following:

- The side effects persist for more than a few days.
- Your fever is high (>38°C) or persists for more than 48 hours (2 days) despite taking paracetamol.
- You have fever accompanied by fits.
- You experience severe allergic reactions (or anaphylaxis) where you may feel severe anxiety, itchy skin rash, swelling of the lips and face or difficulty in breathing.

If you feel it is serious you may need to call an ambulance or go directly to a hospital emergency department.

Where can I get more information?

You may call the Ministry of Health (MOH) Hotline at 1800-333 9999 should you need more information on the pandemic vaccination and the side effects of the vaccine.

For more information on the H1N1 pandemic and the H1N1 pandemic vaccine, you can also visit the MOH website: <http://www.moh.gov.sg>