

Pandemic H1N1 Influenza
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August 19, 2009

As summer moves closer to fall, Los Angeles County prepares to face not only continuing cases of pandemic H1N1 flu (formerly known as “swine flu”), but also the regular, seasonal flu. Keep in mind that the word “pandemic” does not mean that the symptoms of this flu virus are more severe, but only that H1N1 is widespread around the world.

In the coming weeks, you will be hearing more information from Public Health about the seasonal influenza vaccine and the pandemic H1N1 vaccine. On July 29, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that H1N1 vaccination efforts focus on the following five key populations:

- Pregnant women,
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- Health care and emergency services personnel,
- Persons between the ages of 6 months through 24 years of age, and
- People from ages 25 through 64 years who are at higher risk **of complications from** pandemic H1N1 flu infection because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

These vaccination efforts are focused on reducing the impact and spread of pandemic H1N1 flu.

The H1N1 vaccine is expected to arrive in Los Angeles County by about mid-October. The two-dose H1N1 vaccine will be distributed through normal providers, such as your doctor or some pharmacies and workplaces, and through some public organizations, such as Public Health. While the H1N1 vaccine does require two visits to your vaccine provider, the benefits in terms of protecting your health and the health of your loved ones are well worth it.

More than one flu virus can circulate through communities, which is why we are also promoting the seasonal flu vaccine, which comes out every year. The seasonal flu vaccine will be available as early as September. It is recommended for everyone, starting at 6 months of age. The seasonal flu vaccine will be made available through your usual doctor or health care provider.

Vaccine is one of the most important layers of defense against the flu, and there are a few additional steps that everyone can do to help protect their health. Wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes, avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes, and stay home if you or your child is sick. We strongly encourage all families to start thinking about alternative childcare in case a sick child needs to stay home from school, daycare, or after-school programs during an illness and for at least 24 hours after fever ends. If you do not have a fever, wait for 24 hours after your symptoms subside. Employers are encouraged to develop business continuity plans in case sick employees need to take time off for themselves or a family member. These proactive steps can minimize the spread of disease and safeguard the health of our community.