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### **H1N1 Vaccine Available as Shot or Nasal Mist**

By Brenda Kailing, RN, BSN, District Health Department #10

There are two forms of flu vaccine – injection (the shot) or nasal mist (the spray). This is true for H1N1 vaccine as well as regular seasonal flu vaccine. The form you are able to get depends on both your own personal characteristics and local availability of vaccine.

The flu shot has been around since 1945. The injectable vaccine is made from inactivated “killed” portions of one or more specific flu viruses. It may be given to almost anyone older than 6 months who wants it. People who shouldn’t get it are those who have a severe allergy to eggs, Guillain-Barre syndrome, or a life-threatening allergic reaction to any previous flu vaccine.

The nasal spray seasonal flu vaccine was first made in 2003. It consists of “live attenuated” viruses that are weakened so they cannot grow in the cooler temperatures of the nose. It is only given to healthy persons between the ages of 2 and 49 years who are not pregnant. It should not be given to any child younger than 2 years; pregnant women; people aged 50 years and older; people with chronic health problems or weak immune systems; children less than 5 years old who have had recurrent wheezing; children or adolescents receiving aspirin therapy; people who have had Guillain-Barre syndrome; anyone with a severe allergy to chicken or eggs; or anyone in close contact with a person with a severely weakened immune system.

Both forms of H1N1 vaccine are manufactured in the same facilities, using the same methods, as seasonal flu vaccine. Seasonal flu vaccines have been given safely for many years, and there is no biological reason to expect H1N1 vaccine to behave any differently in the body. Both forms are also expected to be equally effective. Some reports have even indicated that the nasal mist works so well because it starts in the nose where flu infection normally starts.

Neither type of flu vaccine can cause someone to get sick with the flu. Virus particles in the vaccines do not change into the kinds of viruses that cause flu infection in the person receiving the vaccine, or that can be spread to others.

Some injectable vaccines contain thimerosal, a preservative that keeps germs from growing in the vials. Multiple research has shown that thimerosal is not harmful in the very small amounts found in vaccines. Nasal spray vaccine does not contain thimerosal. There will be some preservative-free injectable vaccine available.

Due to early limited amounts of H1N1 vaccine and the way in which it is being released by manufacturers, persons who meet the qualifications for the nasal mist may not be given the shot even if that is their first choice. To ensure everyone gets the best protection against H1N1 flu, it must be given first to those at highest risk for illness, and then to others according to supplies on hand. It just doesn’t make good health sense to withhold or reserve vaccine when it could be in bodies producing antibodies against a disease that has caused the death of even one individual.

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