

Public Health

Seattle & King County

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BREAKING NEWS: Thimerosal limits law temporarily suspended for H1N1 vaccine

Washington State Secretary of Health Mary Selecky has temporarily suspended Washington's law limiting the amount of mercury (thimerosal) in H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine allowed for pregnant women and children younger than three years old. The six-month suspension is effective September 23, 2009 through March 23, 2010 and *applies only to H1N1 vaccines*. It does not apply to seasonal flu vaccine.

Notification requirements: When the mercury limits are suspended, Washington law requires that providers notify the following individuals IF they are being given vaccine containing more mercury than is usually allowed (*if you are using thimerosal free vaccine, notification is not required*):

- Pregnant or lactating women
- The parent or guardian of a child under 18 getting the vaccine.

There is no single notification method required. Written or verbal notification is acceptable. The Department of Health has developed a sample notification form to help you with this. There is also a chart that you can use providing guidance on screening patients to determine who needs to be notified. The notification form and other information on the temporary suspension of the mercury limits for H1N1 vaccine are available online (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/providers/h1n1-thimerosal.htm).

Background: As a precaution, Washington state law limits the amount of mercury that can be in vaccines for pregnant women and children under three. The secretary of health can suspend the law when there is a shortage of vaccine or during a disease outbreak – both criteria apply to the H1N1 vaccine. Some H1N1 vaccine will be

mercury-free, but it may not be available at all times, and there may be limited amounts. This could stop children younger than three and pregnant women who want the vaccine from getting it. H1N1 vaccination will be voluntary. Pregnant women and children under three years are two of the priority groups to get H1N1 vaccine first, because they are at high risk for serious complications if they're infected with H1N1 (swine flu) virus.

Novel H1N1 Influenza Resources

As the H1N1 influenza situation in the United States changes, you'll find the most current resources for H1N1 news and information online. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created a website with H1N1 information just for clinicians - www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/clinicians. On this website you'll find the following types of information:

- Clinician guidance for patient management
- Clinician guidance for specific populations, including pregnant women
- Antiviral recommendations
- Vaccine resources, and
- Patient information and education

For H1N1 guidance specific to clinicians in Washington State, including surveillance, reporting, and lab testing visit www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/h1n1_health.htm.

Monitoring and Reporting Adverse Events Following Vaccination

Health care providers will play an important role in monitoring the safety of the new H1N1 influenza vaccine. Adverse events following vaccination can be reported and tracked through the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS). The VAERS report form is available online at www.vaers.hhs.gov. Reports can be completed by health care providers, parents, and patients. You can report to VAERS

- Online at <https://www.secure.vaers.org>
- By faxing a completed VAERS form to 1-877-721-0366, or
- By mailing a completed VAERS form to the address on the form.

Adverse events following any vaccination, not just new vaccines, can be reported to VAERS.

H1N1 Vaccine Safety

CDC has posted the following information about H1N1 influenza vaccine safety on their website: General Questions and Answers on 2009 H1N1 Influenza A Vaccine Safety: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccine_safety_qa.htm; General Questions and Answers on Thimerosal: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/thimerosal_qa.htm; and General Questions and Answers on Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS): www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/gbs_qa.htm



Vaccines For Children

Program News and Alerts

The VFC Provider Manual Goes Digital

We have been happy to hear from many clinic staff that they have found the VFC Provider Manual to be helpful, convenient and complete. One drawback, however, has been the difficulty of keeping its contents up-to-date for everyone. **To meet the need for a reliably current manual, we have converted it into a PDF at www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/immunization/vfc.aspx#providers (scroll to the bottom of the page).** The link opens to the complete 230-page manual but you can view or print only those pages or sections that you need—anytime access in one location to the latest in information on children's vaccines. We also welcome suggestions for additions to the VFC Provider Manual. Let us know what you think!

Fax of Life

As King County's VFC Program has grown, our old reliable fax machine has, at times, not had enough memory to receive all incoming documents. Because of the advent of H1N1 influenza vaccine (and supplemental funding), we recognized a need and an opportunity for greater fax receiving capacity. **Beginning October 1, 2009, fax your reports and vaccine requests to the old fax number (206) 205-5780—now with more memory—or to the new fax number (206) 296-1173.** If possible, we will have the machines programmed so that overload on the 5780 machine forwards to the 1173 machine. We hope this will mean less frustration for clinic staff and speedier response from VFC.

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

The formulations this year are:

- Fluzone PF (0.25 mL single dose syringe) for all children 6-35 months of age
- Fluzone multi-dose vial (10 doses of 0.50 mL) for all children/teens 3-18 years of age; contains preservative
- FluMist (0.2 mL) live attenuated intranasal spray for all children/teens 2-18 years of age; preservative-free
- Fluvirin PF (0.50 mL single dose syringe) for teens up to the 19th birthday who will be pregnant during influenza season

Please note and abide by the usage restrictions for each of the formulations. Washington State law prohibits administering vaccines containing preservative to children under 3 years of age or to pregnant women of any age. The Secretary of Health has suspended the thimerosal limits for children under 3 years and pregnant women for H1N1 vaccine only. **Thimerosal limits are still in effect for seasonal influenza vaccine.**

All providers requesting seasonal influenza vaccine should have received at least a portion of their original order by September 25th. **For those clinic sites ordering large amounts of vaccine, please contact the VFC Program at (206) 296-4774 when you want to request another installment of your order.** This eliminates the possibility of vaccine sitting unused at ABC Clinic while XYZ Clinic is forced to wait for the next allocation to arrive at the vaccine distributor (McKesson). We also do not want to overwhelm your vaccine storage capacity!

Do You need a New Refrigerator?

This is a reminder that the CDC no longer permits the use of dorm-style refrigerators for long-term vaccine storage. "Dorm-style" is defined as a unit with a freezer shelf inside the refrigerator, rather than as a separate, insulated compartment. Contact the VFC Program at (206) 296-4774 for help in finding the right type of refrigerator for your vaccine storage needs and office size. Dorm-style refrigerators may be used for storing small amounts of vaccine during the clinic day, but should be emptied each night before closing. And finally, never store refrigerated vaccines directly beneath a dorm-style freezer shelf, and never store varicella vaccine in a dorm-style freezer.

Did you know...

...about administering seasonal and H1N1 vaccines?

- The **seasonal flu vaccine** contains the A/Brisbane H1N1 strain. This is the seasonal H1N1 strain that was circulating during the 2008-2009 influenza season. If the novel H1N1 outbreak in spring 2009 had started a few months earlier, and the novel H1N1 virus could have been isolated sooner for vaccine production, the novel H1N1 strain probably would have been in the seasonal flu vaccine. That's why the novel H1N1 vaccine, known as "A/California (H1N1)" was licensed as a "change of strain," the same way seasonal flu vaccines are licensed.
- The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licensed the novel H1N1 vaccine from four manufacturers on September 15, 2009 (a fifth manufacturer will be licensed soon.) Children under the age of 10 years will need two doses, with a minimum of 28 days between doses. All other age and risk groups need only one dose.
- Four formulations will be available for seasonal and novel H1N1 vaccines: prefilled syringes of 0.25 ml and 0.5 ml, multi-dose vials, and FluMist intranasal.
- The novel H1N1 vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine can be administered at the same visit, or at separate times with no minimum interval between them, with one exception: If both the seasonal flu and the novel H1N1 flu vaccines are given as FluMist, there must be four weeks between the vaccines. Only one FluMist vaccine can be given at a visit.
- FluMist can be given either at the same time as other live virus vaccines (MMR and Varicella), or with 4 weeks between the doses.

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