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Stay safe, get a flu shot



It's always important for people with asthma to get their yearly flu shot. But this year, it is even more critical, and it involves more than one shot. Public health officials are concerned that the H1N1 flu virus (sometimes called "swine flu"), which first emerged last spring, could infect even more people in the United States during this year's winter flu season.

Flu viruses infect a person's upper respiratory tract. As a result, people

with respiratory problems—including asthma—are more likely to experience serious health problems if they get the flu. For example, if you have asthma and get the flu, you may be more likely to have an asthma attack. Children and young adults, pregnant women and people with other underlying health conditions also need to be vigilant when it comes to the new flu strain.

The CDC is working to ensure that adequate supplies of an H1N1 flu vaccine are available before the flu season hits in the United States. Once the vaccine is available, people with asthma should get vaccinated. This new vaccine will not protect against the seasonal flu, so you may need to receive two vaccinations to stay healthy. The CDC recommends that all children receive the seasonal flu vaccine.

To the Point

People with asthma may face serious health risks if they are infected with the H1N1 flu virus. Getting vaccinated and taking basic preventive steps (such as washing your hands and covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze) are the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Know the symptoms

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of the seasonal flu. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your doctor:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Lack of appetite
- Coughing

Some people infected with the H1N1 flu virus may also have a runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Catching symptoms of the flu early is important, because antiviral drugs are most effective when taken within 48 hours of infection.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that only one-third of adults with asthma receive the flu vaccine every year.
- Men and African Americans are less likely to receive a flu vaccine than women and whites, according to the CDC.
- Adults older than 65 may have natural antibodies to H1N1 because of exposure to older flu strains. However, older adults, particularly those with asthma, should still get vaccinated against the seasonal flu and take steps to avoid infection.
- The greatest number of H1N1 flu cases have occurred in children and adults under the age of 24.

An allergist/immunologist is the best-qualified medical expert to diagnose and treat allergies and asthma. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the Physician Referral Directory at www.aaaai.org.

For more information on allergies and asthma, please visit the Patients & Consumers Center of the AAAAI Web site, www.aaaai.org.



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