

Time for vaccination against the new A(H1N1) flu

Questions and answers about the pandemic vaccine

The vaccination programme against the new A(H1N1) flu, also known as swine flu, is currently underway. Each municipality has responsibility for organizing the vaccination programme locally and informing the community.

The Pandemrix vaccine has been approved by European and Norwegian pharmaceutical authorities. In this leaflet you will find answers to some important questions relating to the vaccine, who will be offered it first, and why vaccination is recommended.

Additional information about the new A(H1N1) flu strain can be found at the health authorities' website www.pandemi.no. You can also phone the pandemic helpline: 815 55 015.

Why vaccinate against the new A(H1N1) flu?

Vaccination is the best protection against the new A(H1N1) flu, also known as swine flu. For most, the flu will be mild, but some people may become seriously ill. The health authorities recommend vaccination to prevent you from becoming ill with the flu, and to avoid complications and possible death. By being vaccinated, you also help prevent your family and others close to you from becoming infected. All vaccination in Norway is on a voluntary basis.

Who will be offered the vaccine first?

People at particular risk of complications and healthcare professionals will be offered the vaccine first. Once these groups have been vaccinated, the vaccine will be offered to the rest of the population. Those recommended be vaccinated are:

- Pregnant women in their second and third trimester (after the 12th week of pregnancy). Pregnant women in their first trimester that run an additional risk of becoming seriously ill may be vaccinated after careful evaluation.
- Adults and children older than 6 months who suffer from the following conditions:
 - chronic respiratory diseases, especially those with reduced lung capacity
 - chronic cardiovascular diseases, especially those suffering from serious heart failure
 - reduced immunity to infection, regardless of cause

- diabetes type 1 or 2
- chronic kidney failure
- chronic liver failure
- chronic neurological disease or injury
- extreme obesity

If you've already had the flu, do you still need to be vaccinated?

Having had the flu normally protects you from catching the same type of flu again. For people who are not sure whether they have had the new flu, the safest option is to be vaccinated. Anyone who has been confirmed as having had the A(H1N1) flu by means of laboratory tests does not need the vaccine. It is not harmful to be vaccinated even if you have already had the new flu.

How is the pandemic vaccine produced?

Pandemrix is produced in the traditional way, by culturing the virus in eggs. The vaccine is based on elements of the new A(H1N1) influenza virus and does not contain live virus. It can therefore not give you the flu.

Is the pandemic vaccine safe?

Pandemrix has been approved throughout Europe, as well as by Norwegian pharmaceutical authorities. Such approval is based on a thorough assessment of the vaccine's effectiveness and safety.

All medicines can produce side-effects. Pandemrix may produce a slightly stronger reaction than vaccines against normal seasonal influenza, such as pain, tenderness and swelling at the site of the injection. Other common side-effects that arise somewhat more frequently are headache, fatigue and fever.

Since the vaccine is cultured in eggs, anyone with a serious egg allergy should be cautious.

Possible rare side-effects can only be discovered through regular use of the vaccine in large population groups, and a comprehensive system to detect such effects has been established both nationally and internationally.

Does the vaccine contain artificial additives?

Because the vaccine is supplied in vials holding several doses, it contains the preservative thimerosal, a mercury-containing organic compound with an anti-bacterial effect, necessary to prevent the growth of bacteria in the vial once it has been opened. Thimerosal as an additive in vaccines has been the object of intensive study in large population groups. These studies give no indication that use of thimerosal in vaccines is harmful to health.

The vaccine also contains a combination of oils, including squalene (a natural oil found in all plants and animals), and vitamin E. This oil mixture is added to boost the body's immune response to the vaccine.

Do I need to be vaccinated against regular seasonal flu as well as the new A(H1N1) strain?

The pandemic vaccine and the vaccine against seasonal flu protect against different viruses. For some people both vaccines will therefore be recommended. They can be administered at the same time, one in each arm.

What does it cost to be vaccinated?

The amount you will have to pay to be vaccinated will vary from municipal authority to municipal authority. The cost to vaccinate a child will also vary correspondingly. The vaccination fee is not covered by the healthcare cost exemption regulations (blue prescription and patient deductibles ceiling 1).

How is the vaccine administered?

Contact your municipal authorities to find out how the vaccination programme is being organised in your area. The vaccine itself is administered through an injection in the upper arm. It appears two doses are needed to ensure protection, applied at least three weeks apart.

Have your personal identification number (11 digits) with you when you get vaccinated.

You will have to wait about 20 minutes after the vaccine has been administered to be sure you do not experience an allergic reaction.