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Questions and Answers

Pandemic Influenza H₁N₁ Vaccine Fact Sheet

1. **What is the Pandemic H₁N₁ Influenza?**

H₁N₁ Flu Virus is a new type of Influenza A Virus which was first found in humans in the spring of 2009. It has been reported in Canada (including PEI) and around the world. The symptoms of H₁N₁ Flu Virus are similar to those of regular influenza and include cough with or without fever plus one of the following: sore throat, body aches and pains, fatigue and lack of appetite. Gastrointestinal symptoms (like vomiting and diarrhea) may also be present. Fever may not be prominent in those under 5 years of age and those over 65 years of age.

2. **What is the Pandemic H₁N₁ Influenza Vaccine?**

The H₁N₁ influenza vaccine is made the same way as the seasonal influenza vaccine but it protects only against the H₁N₁ influenza virus. The H₁N₁ influenza vaccine is made of inactivated H₁N₁ influenza particles (the virus is killed but is able to cause the body to make antibodies against the H₁N₁ virus). It cannot give you H₁N₁ influenza disease.

3. **What are the contents of the H₁N₁ influenza vaccine?**

The H₁N₁ influenza vaccine contains an antigen (protein particles) from inactivated virus of the pandemic A/California influenza strain of H₁N₁ virus along with residual amounts of egg protein, formaldehyde, sodium deoxycholate, sucrose, thimerosal as preservative, stabilizing compounds and water for injection. The H₁N₁ influenza vaccine also contains an adjuvant emulsion which consists of oil, water and vitamin E. This adjuvant called ASO₃ helps the vaccine to give much more immunity with a lower dose of antigen in the vaccine.

The vaccine is gluten-free, as well as free from antibiotics and latex. The full list of ingredients is listed in the product monograph which is available from a Public Health Nurse.

4. **Who should NOT receive the vaccine?**

- ▶ infants under 6 months of age
- ▶ anyone who has a severe allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine including eggs
- ▶ anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylactic or life threatening) to seasonal influenza in the past
- ▶ anyone who has experienced Guillain-Barre Syndrome
- ▶ anyone who is ill with a fever at the time of the clinic should return on a later date when they are well.

For those with non life-threatening allergies to eggs, a separate clinic will be held and the nurse will take the name and contact information of those people.

5. What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

Most people experience no serious side effects from the vaccine. Local side effects such as pain, redness and swelling at the injection site that may last up to two days are very common. Fever for 24 to 48 hours, especially in children less than 5 years old, has been reported. Other side effects that have been reported include fatigue, headache, muscle aches, red eyes, and shivering. All of these should go away within 1 to 2 days.

As with all vaccines, there is a very small chance that a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) can occur within 15 to 20 minutes of receiving the vaccine. Procedures are in place to quickly respond to anaphylaxis. Public health nurses are trained to treat the condition by giving adrenaline and closely monitoring the symptoms.

Please remain in the waiting room for 20 minutes after immunization for observation.

6. What can I do if I get a local reaction like pain, redness or swelling to the H₁N₁ Influenza vaccine?

Place a cold compress on the injection site to reduce discomfort.

If you are experiencing discomfort or fever, acetaminophen or ibuprofen can relieve these symptoms. Do not give Aspirin (ASA) to children under 18 years of age due to its possible link with Reye's Syndrome.

If you have a severe reaction or if your reaction persists, you may need to see a physician. Please advise the local public health nursing office if this happens.

7. What are the risks if the vaccine is not received?

The H₁N₁ influenza virus is very contagious to a person who is non-immune. The H₁N₁ strain of influenza is circulating in our community. It is of most concern to young children, pregnant women, people with high risk health conditions, and the caregivers and household contacts of these people.

While H₁N₁ vaccine does not provide 100% protection against the illness, it does reduce the chances of getting the illness and reduces the chances of complications. H₁N₁ has been noted to cause severe illness in some who get the virus, particularly children, pregnant women, people with high risk conditions and those with decreased immunity.

The H₁N₁ vaccine is also recommended for caregivers and household contacts of those who are most likely to become ill or get severe complications with H₁N₁ so as to decrease the chance of spreading the H₁N₁ virus.