

## Public health is public wealth

Written by Deanna Herbert

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With influenza-like-illness on the rise and H1N1 vaccine on the way, I thought I'd share some of the most frequently asked questions we're getting at your local public health agency, in the hopes that a little knowledge will go a long way.

Why won't they test me/my kid for influenza? Influenza, both H1N1 and seasonal flu, is expected to be very widespread this fall and winter—much more so than in previous years—making doctors' offices and laboratories stretch their resources. Unless you, or someone in your family, have an underlying health condition (your physician will help determine this) you probably won't be tested or even seen by your doctor.

Underlying health conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, can put a person at a much higher risk of severe illness from influenza and may alter the way they are treated, so it's important that these people are identified.

When can I get vaccinated? While vaccine for H1N1 is definitely on its way, the amounts will be extremely limited for the first couple of weeks, making it a priority to make it available to those most at risk for severe illness first. However, regular weekly shipments of vaccine will come throughout the rest of the year, making it available to more people.

Providers of H1N1 vaccine are urged to follow federal and state guidelines regarding giving vaccine to those individuals that are most at risk for developing severe illness from influenza. In Colorado these people include:

—pregnant women;

—people who live with or care for children under six months of age;

—healthcare workers with direct patient contact;

—children six months to four years of age; and

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—children five to 18 years of age with chronic medical conditions.

As more vaccine arrives public health will be widely advertising what groups it is available for, but you can always call your physician or your local public health agency to inquire whether or not vaccine is available at any given time.

If I was already ill with influenza or what I think was influenza, should I still get vaccinated for H1N1? The state health department is advising all members of the above priority groups to get the H1N1 vaccination regardless of prior influenza-like-illness. The only reason someone would not need to be vaccinated is if they were laboratory PCR confirmed for H1N1 (and even these individuals could still get the vaccine without any issues).

When should I call the doctor? If you or someone in your household has a chronic medical condition, it is never too early to visit with your healthcare provider about planning for what you should do if a family member gets ill with influenza. While most people can care for themselves or family members with influenza there are certain emergency warning signs to be on the lookout for that would necessitate a call to a medical provider. These symptoms include:

—difficulty breathing or chest pain

—purple or blue discoloration of the lips

—vomiting and unable to keep liquids down

—signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry

—seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)

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—less responsive than normal or becomes confused

For more information about H1N1 visit [www.nchd.org](http://www.nchd.org) and click on the H1N1 information graphic, or call 522-3741 ext. 257 or 241.