



NEWS RELEASE

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System
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First Line of Defense for H1N1 Flu is the Phone

Public Health Officials Suggest Phone Support First Line of Defense

Newark, NJ, October 6, 2009 — Current media attention forecasting the arrival of H1N1 flu vaccines in the next few weeks¹ and stories about its potential as a pandemic² have people focused on medicinal cures and treatments rather than prevention or perspective, according to Dr. Steven Marcus, Executive Medical Director of the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES). “The viral nature of this latest flu strain should be cause for greater use of the phone as the public’s first line of defense to reduce spread of infection,” Marcus notes. State residents can call trained medical professionals at the NJPIES hotline (**1-800-222-1222**) to get information about various flu strain symptoms, prevention measures, as well as treatments and proper dosages.

Public health officials agree that most cases of this season’s flu, including the H1N1 strain, will not require medical intervention, and will be best treated the old-fashioned way with bed rest and plenty of fluids. Those considered most at risk are those historically at highest risk for the flu, including pregnant women and people with preexisting chronic conditions. However, H1N1 is considered more contagious than the seasonal flu and children, rather than seniors, are likely more susceptible.⁶

“The pandemic concern about H1N1 has people flooding doctor’s offices and ERs sooner than they might otherwise, thereby causing yet a different strain — a strain on the current health care system,” Marcus notes. The use of phone and web resources before venturing out may minimize the spread of the flu and may make the difference between a bad flu season and a pandemic. The best way to fight the flu remains the same: keep your immune system strong, take preventative measures such as washing hands frequently and become informed.

Correct Dosage Important

Being informed includes understanding the correct dosage of flu remedies both for prescribed and over-the-counter medications. “People frequently mix medications with over-the-counter

remedies and in doing so, may not realize that they are doubling and tripling ingredients to potentially toxic dosages,” warns Marcus.

Vigilance is also needed with prescribed medications. For instance, a common script for infants diagnosed with H1N1 is liquid Tamiflu administered through a syringe. Syringe measurements are generally printed in milliliters while directions to parents can be provided as percentages of teaspoons. “It’s important that parents ask their doctors and pharmacists questions about the correct dosage,” Marcus notes. Parents are also encouraged to call the NJPIES hotline for help in converting teaspoon dosages to milliliters.

A poison is defined as anything that can cause injury or death, particularly when experienced in the wrong dosage. Everything from bee stings to peanut butter allergies are poisonous substances tracked by NJPIES and are examples of how a seemingly harmless medicinal dosage to one person is toxic to another. Poisoning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury death in New Jersey and the third-leading cause nationwide. Children are most at risk. Education is the first line of defense towards prevention and free help is just a phone call away anytime of day or night to the NJPIES hotline.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey’s official Poison Control Center, The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) provides information on poison prevention and treatments. One of its key functions is to track adverse reactions to drugs and vaccines including flu treatments and provide data to the FDA and CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS).

Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hotline services and the web. It coordinates State poison education and research and is the designated regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. Medical professionals including physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies, poison prevention information, drug information, food poisoning, animal bites, and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies should call the toll free hotline **1-800-222-1222** anytime. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **(973) 972-9280**.

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Side Bar: H1N1 Flu Perspective:

- The vaccine is recommended for pregnant women as a high-risk group. Some are afraid to take the vaccine for fear of miscarriages. There are 2,400 miscarriages a day in the U.S. Miscarriages will occur during the vaccination process, but not due to the vaccine.³
- All flu vaccines — for the seasonal or H1N1 flu — will be voluntary. There are no mandatory flu vaccines.⁴

- Unfortunately, there are deaths associated with every flu season, H1N1 flu or otherwise. Although 600 deaths have been attributed to the H1N1 flu in the U.S., approximately 36,000 Americans die each year from the seasonal flu.⁵
- Vaccines intended for children have no mercury in them. Even vaccines intended for adults are virtually mercury free. This year's H1N1 vaccine has been manufactured and tested in the same manner as flu vaccines have for decades and there is no reason to believe that it will act in any other way than the annual flu vaccine. Thousands of doses have already been administered throughout the world with no apparent problems reported.

Cited Sources:

¹ "Swine flu starts arriving in 2 weeks," Associated Press, AP newswire, September 24, 2009.

² "Who's Afraid of The Flu?" *Time Magazine*, September 28, 2009.

³ "Swine Flu Officials' Message: Don't Blame Shots for All Ills," quote from Jay C. Butler, chief of the swine flu vaccine task force at the CDC as reported in *The New York Times*, September 28, 2009.

⁴ "Flu Fact: H1N1 Flu Vaccination is VOLUNTARY," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, flu.gov <http://www.flu.gov/news/blogs/vaccinevoluntary.html>.

⁵ "Could Swine Flu Panic Be Worse Than Outbreak Itself?" Everydayhealth.com, September 22, 2009, <http://www.everydayhealth.com/publicsite/news/view.aspx?id=631022>.

⁶ "Swine Flu Symptoms," Diana Rodrigues, medically reviewed by Cynthia Haines, MD. Everydayhealth.com, September 25, 2009. <http://www.everydayhealth.com/swine-flu/swine-flu-symptoms.aspx>.