

BULLETIN

H1N1 Vaccination set to begin

October 21, 2009

The H1N1 vaccine has just been approved for use across Canada and the vaccination program for BC will begin shortly.

This approval is based upon positive results of clinical trials of the vaccine in Europe.

As with any seasonal flu vaccination campaign HSA encourages members to participate. Vaccination is an integral part of the prevention against serious health risk.

Health care workers will be among the first to be offered the vaccine in BC along with:

- Children over six months of age and under 10 (in some cases unadjuvanted vaccine when this becomes available);
- pregnant women (unadjuvanted vaccine when available);
- people living in remote and isolated communities; and
- adults with chronic conditions.

Note that vaccination for children under six months of age is not authorized.

BC's Centre for Disease Controls most recent statistics indicate that 30% of people hospitalized for H1N1 in BC fall into the "atypical" target group for seasonal flu ... meaning that they have no underlying medical conditions.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT VACCINE

This approved rollout is only for the vaccine containing an adjuvant at this time. An adjuvant is an additive used to boost individual response and allow the vaccine to be administered using less antigen.

While HSA encourages vaccination as part of the prevention process, we are aware that some of our members may have questions about the safety of this vaccine. Most of these questions are linked to the safety of the adjuvant and to the safety of the preservative Thimerosal used to stabilize and prevent contamination of the vaccine.

The link below to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) addresses some of the more common questions about the vaccine.

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/faq_rg_h1n1-eng.php#vac

Because there is little data on the safety of the adjuvant additive for pregnant women and young children, the federal government has also ordered 1.8 million doses without the adjuvant for use in those groups. These doses are not yet ready and it is unclear at this time when they will be available.

ARE EMPLOYEES REQUIRED TO BE VACCINATED?

Health Sciences Professional, Nurses and Community Health collective agreements contain provisions that enable employers to require the employee be vaccinated unless the employees physician has advised in writing that such a procedure may have an adverse effect on the employees health. The Community Social Services sector collective agreements do not contain language with the same requirement to be vaccinated.

The collective agreements covering HSA members do not deal explicitly with antiviral medication.

HSA encourages our members participation in this immunization campaign, however we recognize that some of our members may have medical contraindications to flu vaccinations. If you fall into this category, you must provide the employer with written medical proof. Please obtain documentation from your physician. Employers have also indicated they may ask for medical proof if you are unable to take antiviral medication.

Some employers are taking the position that where workers have not had the vaccination and an outbreak occurs in their work area they must either take an antiviral medication or be sent home without pay until the outbreak is over. If you are being excluded from work because you are not vaccinated or taking antivirals, please contact your steward or Labour Relations Officer at HSA.

Members not covered by public sector agreements should contact their steward or LRO for more information.

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