

# Considering the Options – Getting the flu versus getting a vaccine or taking an antiviral

When considering your options about vaccination there are a number of factors that you should think about. This chart explains the risk of getting the flu versus the benefits and risks of getting an H1N1 flu vaccine and/or taking antiviral medication if you do get the flu.

## If you catch the H1N1 Flu

If you become sick with the H1N1 flu there is a chance you could develop severe flu symptoms and be hospitalized. Knowledge is your best defence. Take steps to protect yourself.

	Getting the H1N1 Flu Vaccine	Taking antivirals after getting the H1N1 flu.
Benefits / Facts	Vaccines have proven benefits. Getting the H1N1 vaccine is the single best way to protect yourself and those around you from the H1N1 flu virus.	Antivirals may decrease the severity of sickness.
	You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine.	Antivirals <b>MUST</b> be taken within the first 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.
	Vaccines are safe. The dangers from vaccine-preventable diseases (like the flu) are many times greater than the risk of a serious reaction to the vaccine.	If you have the flu, talk to your health care provider about treatment options. Antivirals may be one of many treatment options that they might recommend.
	With the H1N1 flu vaccine you will have some immunity to the current strain of the H1N1 flu virus within 10 days.	Recently Health Canada approved the use of antivirals (Tamiflu) for children less than one year of age.
Risks	Vaccine can have side effects but they are usually mild. You need to weigh the risks of side effects with the risks of serious health problems if you catch the flu.	There is a risk of side effects with any medication including antivirals. The most common side effects of the antiviral oseltamivir include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and headaches.
	The most common side effects of the flu vaccine are soreness in the arm where the vaccine was given, sore or red eyes, itchiness and for some a mild fever. Most people experience no serious side effects from the flu vaccine.	The flu virus can adapt and develop resistance to antiviral drugs – this means that the drugs would no longer be effective in treating the H1N1 flu.
	About one out of every million people will have a severe reaction to a flu vaccine, including anaphylaxis or Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS).	Rare cases of anaphylaxis and serious skin reactions, including toxic epidermal necrolysis, Stevens-Johnson syndrome and erythema multiform, have been reported with the antiviral oseltamivir.

To find out more, visit [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca) or call 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232) (TTY 1-800-926-9105)



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KNOWLEDGE IS YOUR BEST DEFENCE

	Getting the H1N1 Flu Vaccine	Taking antivirals after getting the H1N1 flu.
Myth Busting	Thimerosal is a form of mercury used in the H1N1 vaccine to stabilize it and maintain its quality during storage. Thimerosal is a different form of mercury than the mercury known to cause health problems. The amount in flu vaccines is much less than the daily limit recommended – for example a can of tuna fish has more mercury than the thimerosal in the H1N1 vaccine.	Antivirals are not appropriate for everyone. Talk to your health care provider about whether taking antivirals to treat the flu is appropriate for you.
	If you receive the H1N1 vaccine you are at no greater risk of acquiring Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a neurological condition that occurs in approximately two in 100,000 people per year and is most often associated with foodborne infections. The possible risk of acquiring GBS from the flu or the flu vaccine is very small.	Antivirals are taken in pill form (oseltamivir) or as an inhaled medication (zanamivir). They are not given by injections.
	<p>An adjuvanted vaccine is a vaccine that includes a substance that boosts an individual’s immune system and increases their response to a vaccine. An unadjuvanted vaccine has no “booster” element.</p> <p>Adjuvanted vaccines are included in common vaccines such as tetanus and Hep B. The adjuvant in Canada’s H1N1 vaccine is made up of natural ingredients such as water, squalene oil and vitamin E.</p> <p>Unadjuvanted vaccines are preferred for pregnant women when the flu virus is not yet in the community. This is because there are less safety data available on adjuvanted vaccine use during pregnancy.</p>	Antiviral drugs given for treatment of the flu usually need to be taken for five days.

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