

Seasonal flu vaccine is now available

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Seasonal flu vaccine has arrived in Washington. The seasonal flu vaccine won't protect you from H1N1 (swine flu), but it will help you and your family stay healthy this flu season. State health officials urge everyone to do their part by getting vaccinated.

Every year about 36,000 people in the United States die from seasonal flu-related illness and more than 225,000 people are hospitalized. It isn't too early to get a flu vaccine. The protection you get will not wear off before the flu season is over.

"With all the attention to H1N1, people may forget that seasonal flu can also be a very serious disease," says State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "The best way to avoid seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year. And now is the time to do it."

On radio stations across the state, the Department of Health is airing two public service announcements (PSAs) promoting seasonal flu vaccine through October. Both English and Spanish PSAs are airing. They can also be heard on the agency's [H1N1 Resources and Materials Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/h1n1_resources.htm) (http://www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/h1n1_resources.htm). Flu immunization rates are very low (about 25 percent) for young children in Washington. Older adults get vaccinated at a higher rate — 71 percent for adults in Washington over age 65. National data show that just 44 percent of physicians and other health care workers get vaccinated, even though the vaccine helps protect them and their patients.

Everyone can benefit from an annual seasonal flu vaccine. For many people, it's crucial — especially young children, pregnant women, anyone over age 50, and anyone with a chronic condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or asthma. Residents of nursing homes or long-term care facilities should also be vaccinated, as should people living with or caring for a high-risk person. All health care providers should be vaccinated against seasonal flu.

H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine should be available in October and vaccination will be voluntary. Supply may be limited at first, so it will be targeted to high-risk groups, including young children, pregnant women, and health care workers.

"I already got my seasonal flu shot," says Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "I encourage everyone else to get theirs, too."

The Department of Health supplies health care providers with seasonal flu vaccine for children under 19. It's especially important for children less than age 19 who are high risk or who are household contacts of a high-risk person to be vaccinated. The state vaccine is provided to the patient at no cost; however, health care providers usually charge an office visit or administration fee. Adults should consult with their insurance carriers to check on coverage for seasonal flu vaccine.

People are urged to use their regular health care providers for immunizations. For help finding an immunization clinic, call the Family Healthy Hotline at 1-800-322-2588, or your [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm). Adults can also check the American Lung Association [Flu Shot Locator](http://Flucliniclocator.org) (<http://Flucliniclocator.org>).

The Department of Health [Flu News Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/FluNews/) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/FluNews/>) provides additional information on seasonal flu vaccine.