

THE ALLERGY AND ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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What You Need to Know About the Flu, Asthma, and Allergies

H1N1, commonly known as the “swine flu”, is receiving international headlines. Each day health care professionals, as well as the general public, are learning more about this virus.

Individuals with asthma and allergies should take preventative measures to avoid infection as they should with the regular seasonal flu.

Asthma and H1N1

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) recommends the H1N1 vaccination for all individuals with asthma who are older than 6 months of age. Asthma patients are at higher risk for complications if infected with the flu. Dr. Engler recommends that, with rare exception, all patients with asthma receive both the H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccinations. Children under the age of 10 who have never had either vaccine will require two doses of each. Both injection vaccines may be administered at one time.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the majority of H1N1 related pediatric deaths occurred in children with underlying medical conditions, including asthma.

Differentiating Between Allergies and the Flu

H1N1 and the seasonal flu have similar symptoms although they are two different viruses. Many allergy symptoms also mirror those of flu symptoms. Distinguishing allergy symptoms and those of H1N1 or the seasonal flu may be difficult for parents of children with asthma or

allergies. Thomas B. Casale, MD, FAAAAI explains: “Itchy eyes, a scratchy nose or sneezing are symptoms of allergies, but if your child suffers from asthma and develops a fever or nausea and vomiting, consult your physician.”

In case of illness with flu-like symptoms, the CDC recommends staying at home for at least 24 hours. If symptoms worsen, seek medical attention. Antiviral medications are available and may be indicated. Please contact your PCP or our office within the first 48 hours of fever to consider treatment options available.

Food Allergies and Vaccinations

The best prevention offered for both H1N1 and the seasonal flu is vaccination. Dr. Casale reports: “Individuals with egg allergy may be at risk for allergic reaction to H1N1 and the seasonal influenza vaccines due to the egg content in the vaccine preparations. Before getting vaccinated, consult with your health care provider. In most cases, vaccination can be tolerated” if done properly according to the AAAAI’s diagnostic and treatment guidelines.

If you have questions regarding sensitivities to eggs and/or preservatives used in the flu vaccinations please schedule an appointment to discuss.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can patients with asthma receive the flu vaccination given as a nasal spray?

A: Patients with asthma should receive the H1N1 vaccination shot, not the live vaccination administered as a nasal spray.

Q: My five year-old daughter has a runny nose and is coughing. How can

I tell if it is just due to allergies or if she is getting the flu?

A: Allergies don’t usually cause a fever while the seasonal and H1N1 viruses typically do. If your daughter has a fever, is more listless than usual or is experiencing nausea or vomiting, call your physician and keep her home from daycare until your doctor recommends that she may return.

Prevention

The best prevention offered for both H1N1 and the seasonal flu is vaccination, although other simple steps can also help:

- Frequent hand washing
- Wash hands before touching any part of your face
- Gargle twice a day with warm salt water (use Listerine) or clean your nostrils at least once every day with warm salt water. H1N1 takes 2-3 days after initial infection in the throat/ nasal cavity to proliferate and show characteristic symptoms. Simple gargling can help prevent proliferation.
- Boost your natural immunity with foods that are rich in Vitamin C.
- Drink as much of warm liquids (tea, coffee, etc) as you can. Drinking warm liquids has the same effect as gargling, but in the reverse direction. They wash off proliferating viruses from the throat into the stomach where they cannot survive, proliferate or do as much harm.

If you are interested in receiving the H1N1 vaccination please call the clinic for vaccine availability. The current supply is very limited and we are hopeful that we will receive H1N1 vaccine in November or in December. In the meantime, keep up your allergy treatment plan to help avoid symptom flare-ups which can complicate the flu.