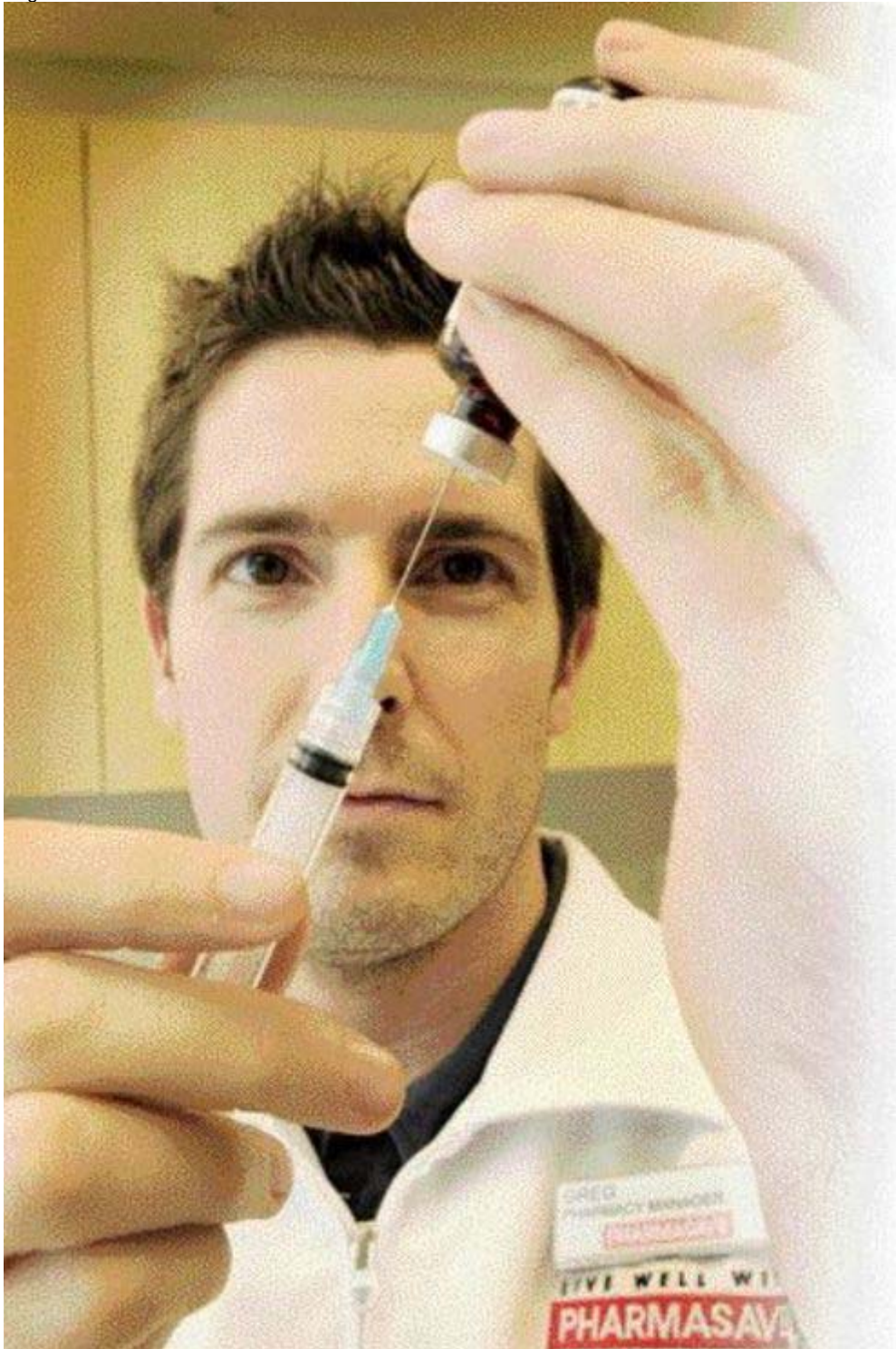


**The Province**

# Should you get the vaccine?

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Wayne Leidenfrost, The Province

Greg Shepherd and other B.C. pharmacists will be authorized for the first time to administer shots during the coming H1N1 vaccination campaign.

## Q&A

Q:Do I have to get vaccinated?

A:No, there's no law requiring that.

Q:What's recommended for children?

A:Babies up to six months old shouldn't get shots. Older than that, they can. Kids six months to five years are near the top of the recommended list.

Q:What if I look after children?

A:It's your call. That doesn't put you in an at-risk or recommended group, but it wouldn't hurt, medical experts say. You'll do better if your child gets sick, and you won't bring the flu home.

Q:And if I'm pregnant?

A:Again, your call. There haven't been any reports of problems among pregnant women who've had shots, according to Linda Lambert of the Division of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the U.S.

The flu has been hard on pregnant women, though. Six per cent of H1N1 deaths in the U.S. were pregnant women -- who make up a tiny percentage of the population.

And the vaccine has appeared to immunize newborns for several months of life.

Q:What about women who are still trying to get pregnant?

A:Entirely your call. "Any which [choice] is fine," according to Dr. Peter Palese, a professor of medicine and infectious diseases at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

Q:What about people who have been sick, or whose children have been sick with flu-like symptoms recently? If there's a chance they've already had swine flu, do they really need to put themselves and their kids through the shots?

A:A flu-like illness could be caused by a wide array of viruses, not just H1N1. Unless the doctor actually tested your children for H1N1 and the test came back positive, your child should get the H1N1 vaccine.

Q:If H1N1 is going to be so predominant, why offer seasonal flu vaccine at all?

A:It's impossible to guarantee that seasonal flu will not occur in B.C. this fall, but if it does, the most vulnerable people will have been protected at no increased risk to them. As such, B.C. is offering to administer H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines at the same time. H1N1 vaccine is

recommended and, if you are normally recommended for seasonal vaccine, you are encouraged to get it, too. People considering getting only a seasonal flu shot are encouraged to speak with a doctor or family physician about benefits and risks -- including Canadian research that shows those who get the seasonal shot before the H1N1 shot may be twice as likely to contract H1N1.

Q:Why are pharmacists giving shots?

A:They don't normally, but some have been given special training in an effort to offer patients more choice and quicker access to the vaccine, the Health Ministry says. To find out how to get shots this way, ask your pharmacist.

Q:And when can I head down to a pharmacy for a vaccination?

A:Not just yet. According to the B.C. Pharmacists Association, it'll be early November before pharmacists begin administering H1N1 vaccine injections. The association is encouraging the public to contact it in coming weeks to find out if there's a certified pharmacist -- certified to give injections, that is -- at their location.