

Vaccinations will begin next week in B.C.

H1N1 and regular flu shots can be given at the same time, based on 'new information'

By Jonathan Fowlie, Vancouver Sun October 22, 2009

British Columbians will start getting their H1N1 flu shots next week, health officials said Wednesday, although doses will at first be limited to those who need them most.

They also revealed that seasonal flu shots will be administered at the same time as H1N1 vaccinations.

"We have new information now -- an expert opinion -- that says we can co-administer it," provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall said.

"So instead of getting the shots two or three weeks apart, it's now possible to get a shot in each arm and be protected against seasonal influenza and against pandemic influenza," Kendall said.

B.C. health officials announced the plan to begin vaccinations next week immediately after Health Canada gave its approval, establishing the kickoff date for what is expected to be the largest mass vaccination program in B.C. history.

"Within the next month, all British Columbians who need and want the vaccine will have the opportunity to begin receiving it," Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong told a news conference.

"With British Columbia in the midst of our second wave of the virus this is absolutely reassuring," Chong said. The province has ordered 4.2 million doses of the vaccine.

Health officials will set up clinics throughout the province, with locations to be posted at www.ImmunizeBC.ca.

Health Minister Kevin Falcon said properly trained pharmacists will be able to administer vaccines, a measure expected to speed the H1N1 program.

Only 150 pharmacists now are trained to vaccinate, meaning the service will at first be limited.

More pharmacists are scheduled for training soon, and the B.C. Pharmacy Association is encouraging the public to check with local pharmacies to find out when and where the shots will be available.

Kendall and others recommended that everyone in B.C. get an H1N1 vaccination, even those who do not normally get a seasonal flu shot.

"This [H1N1] infection is especially serious in those with chronic underlying medical conditions, pregnant women and young children, but the virus has also affected healthy people," said Dr. Monika Naus, director of immunization programs at the B.C. Centre for Disease Control.

"Those most seriously affected are younger people and adults about 30 years younger than what we usually see with seasonal influenza strains," Naus said.

So far, B.C. has received 223,500 doses of the vaccine, meaning officials have decided to limit it at first to people under 65 with chronic conditions, pregnant women and those living in remote and isolated settings.

Those include people living on first nations reserves and the homeless.

Beginning Nov. 2, the shot will also be made available to select other groups, including health-care workers and children between six months and five years old.

The vaccine will be made available to everyone else in the province beginning in mid- to late-November.

Kendall asked people to respect the guidelines.

"I would ask the healthy members of the public to allow those who would most benefit from the vaccine to get it first," he said, adding he was optimistic people will comply.

The federal government recently released guidelines making it clear that Olympic athletes, workers and volunteers will not get early access.

"We have enough vaccine to immunize everyone who needs and wants protection prior to the Olympics," the guideline document said.

"Given the relative mildness of the virus in Canada, there is not enough evidence to show that it is necessary to immunize this group early."

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WHEN TO GET YOUR VACCINE

Now: Those people 65 and over and those living in long-term care homes are currently eligible to receive only the seasonal flu vaccine.

WEEK OF OCT. 26:

- Persons under the age of 65 with chronic conditions.
- Pregnant women.
- Persons living in remote and isolated settings or communities

(including all First Nations people living on-reserve).

WEEK OF NOV. 2:

Starting the week of Nov. 2, the people eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine will expand to include the following groups:

- All initial groups.
- Children 6 months to less than 5 years of age.
- Health care workers (including all health care system workers involved with the pandemic response or delivery of essential health services).
- Household contacts and care providers of infants less than 6 months of age, and persons who are immunocompromised.

MID- TO LATE-NOVEMBER (WHEN NOTIFIED):

Beginning three or four weeks later, everyone else who needs and wants the H1N1 vaccine will be recommended to receive it. Public notification will happen at this time so that everyone is aware the vaccine is available to them.

To find out where you can get your H1N1 and/or seasonal flu shot, visit the Flu Clinic Locator at www.ImmunizeBC.ca or contact your local public health unit.