

Occupational Health Group is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Huntsville Hospital and Decatur General Hospital Systems

## What to do about the Routine Seasonal and Swine (H1N1) Flu? by James F. Gauthier M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director Occupational Health Group



Every year the CDC and health care professionals have a difficult time trying to convince the average person to get their flu shot. This year the CDC may have a particularly hard sell. The reason for this is because they will be trying to convince many individuals to receive two different flu vaccines. One vaccine is for the routine seasonal flu, and the other is for the swine flu, also known as the ‘novel H1N1’ influenza virus.

There are good reasons to consider taking a flu shot. During a normal flu season, about 36,000 people die and over 200,000 people are hospitalized from the flu and its complications. Recently the CDC reported that the H1N1 influenza virus could strike up to 40 percent of all Americans over the next two years and that as many as several hundred thousand could die if the current vaccine campaign and other measures aren’t successful. The American public should keep in mind that influenza is our number-one vaccine-preventable disease.

The yearly flu vaccination campaign generally begins in September or as soon as the vaccine is available. Because the seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against H1N1 influenza virus, a vaccine is currently in production and should be ready for the public tentatively by the end of October, but that date is subject to change. The novel H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine – it is intended to be used alongside seasonal flu vaccine. These vaccines can be administered at the same time though, unfortunately, not in the same syringe.

The groups currently being recommended to receive the H1N1 influenza vaccine are slightly different from those recommended to receive the seasonal flu vaccine (see chart below). Based on data collected thus far by the CDC, older individuals appear to have partial community to the H1N1 virus. The median age of individuals coming

down with the H1N1 virus is 12 years of age. Thus, the approximately 800,000 school aged children in Alabama, along with their parents, will be among the first to receive the two dose immunization series. The CDC will be working with state health departments to dispense and administer the vaccine through schools rather than where they have traditionally been administered. Other priority groups will follow.

For those fearful of needles, you may be relieved to know that there are two types of influenza vaccines:

- The “flu shot” – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. This flu vaccine is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that can not cause the flu. This vaccine is approved for use in healthy people 2-49 years of age who are NOT pregnant.

Remember, you cannot get the flu by taking the flu shot! Some minor side effects that can occur include: localized soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, fever (low grade), and muscle aches. About two weeks after the vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against the influenza virus infection.

You can keep abreast of the latest developments on this year’s annual influenza outbreaks as well as H1N1 influenza virus by consulting the CDC’s and the State of Alabama’s Health Departments web sites frequently:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

<http://adph.org/H1N1Flu/index.asp?id=3571>

	Priority Groups	# of Shots	Availability	Administrative Setting
Seasonal Flu	Children 6 mo. to 18 years, individuals with underlying medical conditions, persons aged 50 years and older, pregnant women, healthcare workers and caregivers	1	Beginning of October	Occupational Health Clinics, Physician’s offices, Health Department, pharmacies, other
H1N1 (Swine Flu)	Pregnant women, parents and caretakers of young children, all healthcare workers, people between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, and non-elderly adults with underlying medical conditions	2	Tentatively scheduled for distribution late October  Go to: <a href="http://adph.org/H1N1Flu/index.asp?id=3571">http://adph.org/H1N1Flu/index.asp?id=3571</a> for current updates	Focus on schools initially



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## Flu Plans for Business

According to the Alabama Department of Health (ADPH), it is important for businesses to have a plan in place for the seasonal and H1N1 Flu virus, in case an employee comes to work ill. The ADPH recommends that all eligible employees receive the seasonal flu vaccine and the swine flu vaccine, when it is available to the appropriate priority groups. They also recommend that employees with fevers stay home until they have 24 hours without a fever and without the use of medication to bring the fever down. These recommendations and others are available online at <http://adph.org>.

## Employee Spotlight: John Reynolds Executive Director



John Reynolds is the Executive Director of Occupational Health Group. Mr. Reynolds is a Huntsville native, so he has a great insight into the challenges and advantages that businesses in our area face in this economy. He graduated from Auburn University in 1975 with his B.S. in History. This was followed by a Masters' in Hospital Administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has over 25 years of experience in healthcare administration in both the For-Profit and Not-for-Profit sectors and has been with OHG since 2004.

## DOT Lifts Stay on Direct Observation for Return to Duty Drug Tests

The Department of Transportation will issue its final ruling on Direct Observation procedures for Return to Work drug tests. The procedure that covers the use of the new Direct Observation techniques, especially in conjunction with new rules regarding mandatory direct observation in cases of return to work transportation employees who have either failed or refused to take a prior drug test, has been in contention due to the federal case, *BNSF Railway Company v. Department of Transportation*. The case purported that the new Direct Observation procedures and the mandated use of direct observation constituted a violation of rights for the employees. The Federal Court of Appeals issued a ruling, as of July 1, 2009, that the stay has been lifted and the new procedures be implemented.

## Handwashing: The Best Way to Help Prevent the Spread of Infections

Handwashing is a simple thing and it's the best way to prevent infection and illness.

In healthcare settings, handwashing can prevent potentially fatal infections from spreading from patient to patient and from patient to healthcare worker and vice-versa. The basic rule in the hospital is to cleanse hands before and after each patient contact by either washing hands or using an alcohol-based hand rub.

At home, handwashing can prevent infection and illness from spreading from family member to family member and, sometimes, throughout a community. In the home, the basic rule is to wash hands before preparing food and after handling uncooked meat and poultry, before eating, after changing diapers, after coughing, sneezing, or blowing one's nose into a tissue, and after using the bathroom.

When washing hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.

- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 15-20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- Always use soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.
- If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast-acting.

When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

## OHG Directory

Administration.....	(256) 922-6675
Marketing and Business Development.....	(256) 922-6677
Billing Department.....	(256) 922-6673
OHG - Huntsville.....	(256) 265-7000
OHG - Madison.....	(256) 774-7300
OHG - Decatur.....	(256) 353-4325
Wellness Services.....	(256) 922-6699

[www.OHGonline.org](http://www.OHGonline.org)

## Holiday Closings

All OHG clinics will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

Labor Day	September 7th
Thanksgiving	November 26th & 27th
Christmas	December 24th & 25th



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