

# 2009 H1N1 Information for Parents who have Children with High-Risk Medical Conditions

*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

[Janine Cory] Welcome to CDC's podcast for parents who have children with high-risk medical conditions. I'm Janine Cory, and with me today is Dr. Georgina Peacock, a developmental pediatrician and a mother of four. Dr Peacock is currently working on CDC's 2009 H1N1 flu response as the co-lead for the Children's Health Team. She has a special expertise in children with high-risk medical conditions. Welcome, Dr. Peacock.

[Georgina Peacock] Hi. Thanks for having me here today.

[Janine Cory] So, let's start with the basics. What is the flu?

[Georgina Peacock] The flu, or influenza, is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it's caused by flu viruses. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays, and deaths in the United States each year, and there are many types of different flu viruses. Each year there are several different flu viruses that circulate, and this year one of the viruses is the new 2009 H1N1 flu virus. What a lot of parents don't know is that flu causes 20,000 hospitalizations of children every year. It truly can be serious and it's not just a cold.

[Janine Cory] Twenty-thousand hospitalizations of children? Well, what are symptoms of flu?

[Georgina Peacock] The symptoms of seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. And this year, what's different with the 2009 H1N1 flu is that we're seeing a lot of children also having vomiting and diarrhea. Also, it's important to note that some of the children who get sick with flu will not have a fever.

[Janine Cory] It sound serious, but do most kids get better?

[Georgina Peacock] Yes. Most children with the flu, including 2009 H1N1 flu, have a mild illness. However, some children can get very sick, especially children who have certain medical conditions that put them at higher risk for flu complications.

[Janine Cory] Medical conditions? What does that really mean? How do I know if my child is at high risk for complications from flu?

[Georgina Peacock] First, it's important to know that all children under the age of five, especially those under the age of two, are at high risk. Also, your child may be at risk if he or she has asthma or neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions.

[Janine Cory] I'm not sure I know what that means. Could you give some examples, please?

[Georgina Peacock] Sure, of course. The conditions we're talking are things such as cerebral palsy; epilepsy; stroke; intellectual disability, or sometimes we call that mental retardation; moderate to severe developmental delay; muscular dystrophy; or spinal cord injury.

[Janine Cory] OK. What about other medical conditions?

[Georgina Peacock] Well other medical conditions that put children at high risk for flu complications include chronic lung disease, like cystic fibrosis; heart disease, such as congenital heart disease or congestive heart failure; blood disorders, such as sickle cell disease; endocrine disorders, such as diabetes; kidney or liver disorders; metabolic disorders, such as mitochondrial disorders; weakened immune system due to disease or medication, such as people who have HIV or AIDS or people who are on medications for cancer or those who are on chronic steroid therapy. Also, children under the age of 19 who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and adolescents who may be pregnant.

[Janine Cory] So children with these medical conditions that you just talked about are at high risk for flu complications. But what does that mean when you say "flu complication"?

[Georgina Peacock] So a flu complication means that a child has severe illness, such as having pneumonia. These illnesses can lead to hospitalization and, in some cases, even death. And sadly, this does happen. There have been more than 150 confirmed deaths in children from 2009 H1N1 flu since April of this year. However, CDC estimates that the number of deaths in children may be much higher—around 500. And many, many more children have been hospitalized.

[Janine Cory] Hospitalization? Death? Now, I really am taking this H1N1 virus seriously. How can I protect my child against this flu?

[Georgina Peacock] The most important thing you can do is to make sure that your child receives the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.

[Janine Cory] Are there any other ways to help at least prevent this virus?

[Georgina Peacock] Sure. There are definitely other ways to protect your child, in addition to getting the vaccination, like good hand washing and keeping surfaces in your house clean. You can find out more information about this if you visit [flu.gov](http://flu.gov). Also, be sure to have a plan for your child in case he or she develops a flu-like illness. Talk to your child's doctor and to the people in their school or child care about your plan.

[Janine Cory] Are these H1N1 flu vaccines safe for my child?

[Georgina Peacock] Yes. Over the years, hundreds of millions of Americans have received seasonal flu vaccines. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is made just like the seasonal flu vaccine, which is made every year. In fact, if the disease had started earlier, this virus strain would have been in the regular flu vaccine instead of a separate vaccine.

[Janine Cory] So it's a separate vaccine, but it was made the same way.

[Georgina Peacock] Exactly. It's important enough that people be protected that they made an additional vaccine. It was made by the same manufacturers that make seasonal flu vaccines, with the highest safety standards, and no corners were cut. It wasn't rushed to market. In addition, people often wonder if this flu vaccine is okay for children with medical conditions, such as asthma. It's very important to remember that children who have high-risk medical conditions, like asthma or diabetes, for example, are at risk for complications from influenza. These are important children to be vaccinated.

[Janine Cory] OK, I'm pretty convinced. Now I saw that there was a nasal spray offered. What type of vaccine should *my* child receive?

[Georgina Peacock] So you're exactly right. There is a nasal spray. However, high-risk children should only receive the shot form of the vaccine.

[Janine Cory] So if my kids are at high risk because of the conditions you mentioned, they need to get just the injectable shot.

[Georgina Peacock] Absolutely. Yes. High-risk children should get the injectable shot.

[Janine Cory] Do they need two doses? How does that work?

[Georgina Peacock] Children younger than 10 years need two doses of the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine. All children older just need one.

[Janine Cory] OK, that makes sense. What if my child has a medical condition and they're at high risk, but they're also allergic to eggs? Should she get the flu vaccine too?

[Georgina Peacock] No. People who have a life-threatening allergy to chicken eggs or to any other substance in the vaccine should not be vaccinated. Parents of children with these allergies should talk to their doctor about other ways to protect them from the flu.

[Janine Cory] I hate to say this, but my daughter at home is already sick. What should I do?

[Georgina Peacock] The most important thing you can do if your child has a high-risk medical condition is to take your child to the doctor if your child develops flu-like symptoms. Your doctor may want to begin treatment as soon as possible.

[Janine Cory] OK, that's good to know. Dr. Peacock, could you please tell me again, what are the most important things for me to know?

[Georgina Peacock] Sure. The most important things for you to know if you have a child with a high-risk medical condition is to vaccinate your child with the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine. If your child develops flu-like symptoms, call or take your child to the doctor. Your doctor may want to begin treatment as soon as possible. And also, have a plan of what you're going to do if your

child develops flu-like symptoms. Be sure you discuss your plan with your child's doctor and also with their school or child care.

[Janine Cory] Thank you, Dr. Peacock.

For more information, visit [flu.gov](http://flu.gov) or get additional resources at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu). Look for the information for parents and caregivers.

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*