



Suspension of Legal Limits of Mercury-Containing Vaccine for H1N1 (Swine Flu) Virus **PARENT/PATIENT NOTICE** September 2009

Why am I getting this notice?

The secretary of health has temporarily suspended Washington's limit on the amount of mercury (thimerosal) in H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine allowed for pregnant women and children younger than three years old. The suspension applies to only to H1N1 (swine flu) vaccines.

When the mercury limits are suspended, Washington law requires you be notified that you're getting vaccine containing more mercury than is usually allowed if you are:

- Pregnant or lactating; or
- The parent or guardian of a child under 18 getting the vaccine.

What are Washington's legal limits on mercury in flu vaccine?

Washington law sets a limit on how much mercury can be in vaccines given to pregnant women and children younger than three years old. The law requires that flu vaccine, including H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine, provided to these two groups have no more than 1.0 microgram of mercury per 0.5 milliliter dose. Your doctor or nurse can help explain the size of these amounts.

How can the state's limit on mercury in H1N1 (swine flu) vaccines be lifted?

The secretary of health can temporarily suspend Washington's legal mercury limit for a vaccine for two reasons: an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease or a shortage of vaccine available to protect the public health against vaccine-preventable disease. The H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine qualifies under both of these reasons.

Why were the H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine mercury limits suspended?

Mercury-free H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine may not be available at all times. The state's mercury limit could prevent pregnant women and children under three years old who want the vaccine from getting it. Lifting mercury limits for H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine will give pregnant women and parents or guardians of children under three the option of getting the vaccine if they want it.

What are mercury and thimerosal?

Mercury is a natural element found in the environment. Environmental mercury can become toxic to people at high levels. Thimerosal is a preservative that uses a different form of mercury to prevent bacterial contamination of some vaccines.

More information about H1N1 (swine flu), vaccine for the virus, and the mercury limit suspension found online (www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/). Vaccine safety information is also available (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/vaccine/vaccine-safety.htm).