

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Parents May Underestimate the Risks of H1N1 Flu for Their Children

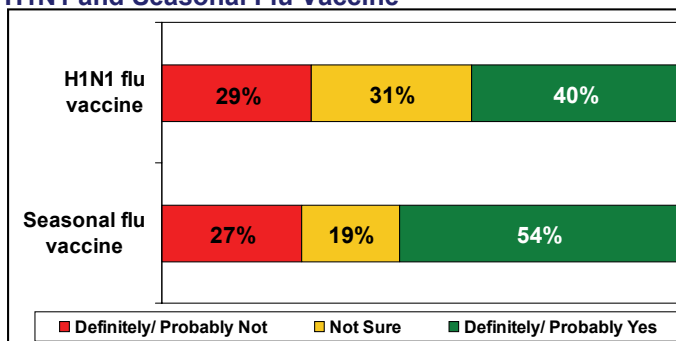
Cases of 2009 H1N1 influenza (previously called “swine flu”) in the United States this year have shown that children appear to be more susceptible to the virus than older adults. As a result, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified children as a priority group for H1N1 influenza vaccination. H1N1 flu vaccine is expected to be available beginning in October, and 2 doses are recommended for young children up through age 10 years.

Recognizing the potential severity of H1N1 influenza for children, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health surveyed a national sample of parents in August 2009, in order to measure their attitudes regarding H1N1 flu and intentions to vaccinate their children against H1N1 flu.

Plans for H1N1 Vaccination of Children

Despite national recommendations issued in July emphasizing the importance for kids of vaccination against H1N1 flu, only 40% of parents intend to have their children vaccinated. In contrast, more than one-half of parents plan to have their children get seasonal flu vaccine this year (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Parents' Plans to Have Children Get H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Vaccine



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

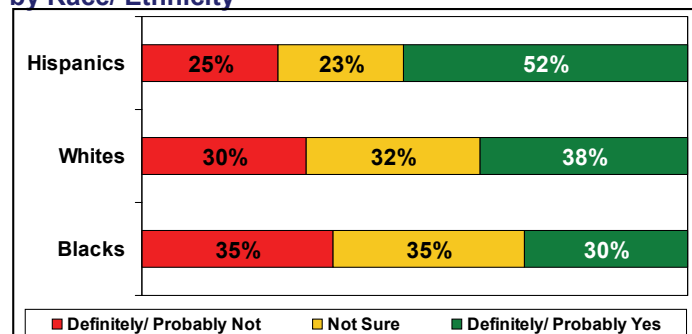
Parents of children with high-risk medical conditions (for example, asthma) are more likely to plan to have those children get H1N1 flu vaccine.

Report Highlights

- Only 40% of parents plan to have their children get the H1N1 flu vaccine—much fewer than those who plan to have children get the seasonal flu vaccine.
- Hispanic parents are more likely than white or black parents to plan to have their children get the H1N1 flu vaccine.
- Nearly one-half of parents who don't plan to vaccinate their children are not worried about their kids getting the H1N1 flu.
- Only about one-third of parents believe that H1N1 flu will be worse for children than seasonal flu.

When comparing racial/ethnic groups, more Hispanic parents plan to have their children get H1N1 influenza vaccine, compared with white or black parents (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Planned H1N1 Flu Vaccination for Children, by Race/ Ethnicity



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Reasons for Parents' H1N1 Vaccine Plans

Parents who report that they definitely or probably will NOT have their children get H1N1 vaccine, or who are unsure, give these reasons:

- 56% Worried about side effects of the H1N1 vaccine
- 46% Not worried about children getting H1N1 flu
- 42% Can take medications to treat H1N1 flu
- 30% Too much hassle to get 2 doses
- 25% H1N1 vaccine won't be required or recommended for school / daycare
- 23% Worried that H1N1 vaccine will be too expensive
- 20% H1N1 is not a serious disease

In contrast, parents who *plan* to have their children get H1N1 vaccine endorse these reasons:

- 83% H1N1 is a serious disease
- 80% Worried about getting H1N1 flu
- 75% H1N1 vaccine is recommended for children
- 62% H1N1 vaccine will likely be required or recommended for school / daycare
- 55% Worried that medications will not be available or effective
- 40% H1N1 vaccine likely to be inexpensive

Parents Estimate the Risk of H1N1 Flu for Children

To measure how parents perceive the risk of H1N1 flu for children, the National Poll on Children's Health asked parents to compare H1N1 flu with seasonal flu.

Across several comparisons, about one-third of parents believe that H1N1 flu will be worse for children than seasonal flu (Table 1). About one-half believe the risks are the same for the two types of flu.

Table 1. How would you compare seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu for each of the following?

	Seasonal flu will be worse	Seasonal flu and H1N1 flu will be the same	H1N1 flu will be worse
Number of children who catch it	24%	44%	32%
Number of children who get very sick and need to be hospitalized	14%	48%	38%
Number of missed school days because children are sick	20%	49%	31%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Parents' perception of risk is closely tied to their plans to have children vaccinated against H1N1 flu. Parents who think H1N1 flu will be worse for children than seasonal flu are substantially more likely to plan to have their children vaccinated against H1N1.

Implications

When the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak was first detected in mid-April 2009, CDC began working with states to collect, compile and analyze information about who was affected. That information, analyzed by CDC, supports the conclusion that 2009 H1N1 flu has caused greater disease burden for children than for older people. Unlike what is typically seen with seasonal flu, the rates of illness and hospitalizations related to H1N1 flu are higher for children than for other age groups.

The results from this National Poll on Children's Health indicate that parents may not fully appreciate the different risk of H1N1 flu for their children. In both their intentions to vaccinate children and their comparisons of H1N1 and seasonal flu, many parents do not feel that H1N1 is a significant health threat. Nearly one-half of parents who do not plan to vaccinate their children indicated that they were not worried about their children getting H1N1 disease; nearly 1 in 5 believed that H1N1 flu is not a serious disease.

Another notable finding is the remarkably high proportion of Hispanic parents who plan to vaccinate their children against H1N1 flu. This may reflect a higher perceived risk among Hispanics, given the well publicized outbreak of H1N1 flu in Mexico in early 2009.

With H1N1 flu now becoming more active across the country, it is important that parents seek information about the benefits and risks of H1N1 vaccination for their children, 6 months and older. Public health officials and health care providers must play a critical role in ensuring that parents understand the risks of H1N1 flu illness and H1N1 flu vaccination, and that children have adequate and timely access to vaccine.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in August 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,678) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 62% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 to 5 percentage points for the main analysis. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

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