



Context

The delivery of influenza vaccination programs in 2009 required rapid planning and implementation. Considerable uncertainty arose regarding the timing of H1N1 and seasonal influenza vaccines when, in mid-October 2009, the preliminary release of unpublished Canadian research indicated that people who received the seasonal flu vaccine the previous year were twice as likely to get the H1N1 virus.¹ In response, many Canadian jurisdictions modified their seasonal flu vaccination strategies.

The Public Health Agency of Canada commissioned independent researchers to look at the data, and the World Health Organization is currently consulting international experts who are investigating their own data for any similarities. Currently, data from the US, Australia, and Europe have not supported the same claim. Conversely, a retrospective Mexican study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, found that the seasonal flu vaccine may help protect individuals against H1N1.² Another recent US study also noted the value of exposure to the seasonal flu vaccine or seasonal flu infection in providing protection from the H1N1 virus.³

At the beginning of November, the Canadian National Advisory Committee on Immunization published the recommendation that immunization for seasonal flu should be offered as soon as possible and that both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines could be administered concurrently.⁴

Objective

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding the seasonal and H1N1 vaccination programs currently offered in Canadian jurisdictions. The following question will be addressed:

What are the strategies employed by Canadian jurisdictions with regard to the deployment of seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccination programs?

Findings

The H1N1 flu vaccine is available to everyone who needs and wants it in each province and territory. Almost all provinces and territories have opened up their H1N1 flu vaccination programs to the general public, after completing the vaccination of high-risk groups.

Most jurisdictions initiated their seasonal flu vaccine programs in October, mainly to elderly people but also to some other high-risk groups. Some jurisdictions intend to open their seasonal flu immunization programs to the general public after the H1N1 vaccination program is complete. In one province (Quebec), the seasonal flu vaccine will be introduced for the first time after the H1N1 vaccination program has been fully delivered. Table 1 provides a summary of jurisdictional programs.

Eight provinces and territories have permitted the concurrent administration of both the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines: British Columbia,⁵ Alberta,⁶ Manitoba,⁷ Ontario,⁸ Nova Scotia,⁹ Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut,¹⁰ and Yukon.¹¹ The seasonal flu vaccine programs were delivered in each of these jurisdictions in October before the availability of the H1N1 flu vaccine. At the time of the release of the H1N1 flu vaccine, some of these jurisdictions temporarily suspended the delivery of their seasonal flu vaccine programs, but have subsequently resumed the service. In Ontario, the seasonal flu vaccine program was temporarily disrupted while the H1N1 vaccine was administered to high-risk groups.¹²

As of December 3, 2009, the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines were being administered concurrently in Ontario.⁸

Although Newfoundland and Labrador has recently permitted the concurrent administration of both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccination programs, this has not yet been the practice in this province.

Three jurisdictions introduced the seasonal flu vaccine in October to individuals identified as being most at risk of serious complications: Saskatchewan,¹³ Prince Edward Island,¹⁴ and the Northwest Territories.¹⁵ Following the completion of the H1N1 mass vaccination program, the seasonal flu vaccine programs will be resumed for remaining high-risk groups. Some of these

jurisdictions are expanding their seasonal flu programs to include the general public.

New Brunswick started delivering its seasonal flu vaccine program in October to individuals identified by the province to be most at risk of serious complications.¹⁶ The province exhausted its supply of the seasonal flu vaccine in October¹⁷ and, subsequently, will not be resuming the program after the completion of the H1N1 mass vaccination program.¹⁸

Quebec is the only jurisdiction that has postponed the administration of the seasonal flu vaccine until January 2010, following the complete delivery of the H1N1 mass vaccination program.¹⁹

Table 1: Seasonal Flu Immunization Programs

Concurrent delivery of seasonal and H1N1 vaccine	British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador
Interrupted delivery of seasonal flu vaccine (during the H1N1 vaccine campaign)	Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories
Postponed delivery of seasonal flu vaccine (until the full delivery of the H1N1 program)	Quebec

Knowledge Gaps

The results of this report are based on a limited literature search and on personal communications with Canadian health care officials. As such, the comprehensiveness of this report cannot be guaranteed. This report is based on information gathered as of December 3, 2009, and may not reflect the most current information.

Conclusion

The H1N1 flu vaccine is available to all Canadians and is administered in each jurisdiction. High-priority groups are receiving the vaccine first, followed by the general public.

The seasonal flu vaccine is available in most, but not all, jurisdictions. Some provinces are

immunizing only high-risk groups. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, and Yukon have permitted the concurrent delivery of both the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines. Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories interrupted the delivery of their seasonal flu vaccines during the implementation of the H1N1 vaccine program. These provinces intend to resume delivery of the seasonal flu vaccine program once the H1N1 vaccine schedule is complete. New Brunswick will not be resuming its program, because it has already exhausted its supply of the vaccine.

Quebec has postponed its seasonal flu vaccine program until the H1N1 program has been fully delivered.

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