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Thimerosal Facts

What is thimerosal?

Thimerosal is a very effective preservative that has been used since the 1930s to prevent contamination in some multi-dose vials of vaccine. Thimerosal is an organic compound containing approximately 49% ethyl mercury. Multiple scientific studies and an extensive review by the Institute of Medicine have shown no evidence of adverse health effects due to thimerosal.*

Does the H1N1 vaccine contain thimerosal?

Yes, multi-dose vials do contain thimerosal. Other H1N1 vaccine preparations (like nasal spray, single dose vials and pre-filled syringes) are preservative-free.

Is it safe for children to receive influenza or H1N1 vaccine that contains thimerosal?

Yes. There is no convincing evidence of harm caused by the small amount of thimerosal in vaccines, except for minor effects like swelling and redness at the injection site due to sensitivity to thimerosal.**

Research suggests that healthy children under the age of 2 are more likely than older children and as likely as people over the age of 65 to be hospitalized with flu complications. In addition, children between 24-59 months of age have higher rates of influenza-related doctor and Emergency Department visits than older children.**

Is it safe for pregnant women to receive influenza or H1N1 vaccine that contains thimerosal?

Yes. A study of influenza vaccination examining over 2,000 pregnant women demonstrated no adverse fetal effects associated with influenza vaccine. Case reports and limited studies indicate that pregnancy can increase the risk of serious medical complications of influenza. One study found that out of every 10,000 women in their third trimester of pregnancy during an average flu season, 25 will be hospitalized for flu related complications.**

Additionally, influenza-associated excess deaths among pregnant women have been documented during influenza pandemics. Because pregnant women are at increased risk for influenza-related complications and because a substantial safety margin has been incorporated into the health guidance values for organic mercury exposure, the benefits of influenza vaccine with thimerosal outweighs the theoretical risk, if any, of thimerosal.**

Sources: * New York State Department of Health June 2008

** Centers for Disease Control & Prevention July 8, 2009

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