



H1N1 VACCINE and THIMEROSAL

Information for Pregnant Women and Families with Children Under the Age of Three

WHAT IS THIMEROSAL?

- Thimerosal is a preservative used to prevent contamination in vials that contain more than one dose of a vaccine; single dose vaccines do not contain thimerosal. Thimerosal contains a very small amount of a type of mercury called ethyl mercury.

WHY IS THERE CONCERN?

- Mercury is a naturally occurring element and can be found in dental fillings, contact lens solutions, antibiotic creams and jewelry.
- There are different types of mercury, such as methyl mercury (found in fish), which stays in the body for months, and ethyl mercury (used in thimerosal), which stays in the body only for a matter of days.
- It has been suggested that there is a relationship between thimerosal and autism, but numerous studies have found NO association between them.
- Since 2001, vaccines for use in children less than 3 years of age and pregnant women have been made without thimerosal; this was done as a precautionary step and NOT because there was evidence confirming that thimerosal-containing vaccines are harmful.
- Currently, supplies of H1N1 vaccine without thimerosal are very limited, and will likely be so for a number of weeks, so the State of California has made a temporary exemption to the law requiring vaccines for children under the age of 3 and pregnant women to be thimerosal-free.

SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE WITH THIMEROSAL?

- H1N1 influenza activity is very high right now
- Young children and pregnant women are among the groups that have been at highest risk of pandemic H1N1 influenza, and the vaccine can **prevent** influenza and influenza-related complications (like hospitalizations and death).
- The thimerosal-containing H1N1 vaccine (from a multi-dose vial) contains only 25 mcg of ethyl mercury, which will be cleared from your body within days; this is in comparison to a 2.5 oz serving of canned white tuna (about ½ can), which has 26 mcg of methyl mercury that will remain in your body for weeks.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say that vaccines containing thimerosal are safe for pregnant women and children less than 3 years of age, and that it is important for pregnant women and young children to be vaccinated as soon as possible to prevent complications from influenza.

