

# Flu vaccine for fall won't protect against swine virus

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By Steve Sternberg, USA TODAY July 21 2009

The Food and Drug Administration approved a seasonal flu vaccine on Monday, in plenty of time to protect people against the three standard flu strains expected to spread this fall.

The agency warned, though, that the seasonal vaccine will not guard against a fourth, potentially more dangerous, strain spreading worldwide. This virus, a novel H1N1 influenza widely known as [swine flu](#), has caused more than 40,000 cases and 260 deaths in the USA and its territories.

Its novelty is what makes it so dangerous. Most people, particularly those younger than 50, haven't been exposed to the new virus or viruses like it, so they're relatively defenseless against infection. On June 11, the [World Health Organization](#) issued its highest infectious-disease alert, declaring that a flu pandemic had begun.

The pandemic flu virus only compounds the already considerable threat posed by seasonal influenza, which results in about 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths every year, says Anthony Fiore, a flu epidemiologist at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

"We know these (seasonal) viruses cause a lot of deaths in older people, people with chronic disease and little babies," he says. "It seems to us that the reasonable thing to do is go full speed ahead with seasonal flu vaccinations."

William Schaffner, a flu expert at [Vanderbilt University](#), agrees. "Many of us are anticipating a double-barreled influenza season this coming year — an outbreak of H1N1 and another one of conventional strains," he says. "Whether they are at different times or overlapping, there's no way to say."

He noted that it would be a challenge to conduct parallel influenza vaccination campaigns, particularly if the pandemic vaccine, which is still in development, requires two doses.

The seasonal vaccine contains an A/Brisbane/59/2007 (H1N1)-like virus, an A/Brisbane/10/2007 (H3N2)-like virus and a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.

Doctors fear that the circulation of multiple flu viruses may make for an especially unpredictable flu season. That's because flu viruses are among nature's most changeable organisms, continuously swapping genes and picking up new traits.

The CDC recommends flu vaccine for children and young people 6 months to 19 years of age; pregnant women; people 50 and older; people with chronic diseases; people in long-term care facilities; and those who live with, or care for, those most susceptible to flu and its complications.

The vaccine makers are CSL Limited; GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals; ID Biomedical Corporation; Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics Limited; [Sanofi Pasteur Inc.](#); and [MedImmune Vaccines Inc.](#)

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-07-20-fluvaccine\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-07-20-fluvaccine_N.htm)