

FDA Panel Recommends Single Flu Vaccine

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WASHINGTON—A U.S. Food and Drug Administration panel Monday recommended the H1N1 pandemic strain be included in the 2010-2011 seasonal influenza vaccine, eliminating the need for two vaccines.

The new H1N1 influenza strain that sparked the current influenza pandemic didn't emerge until April after production for the seasonal influenza vaccine had already started for the 2009-2010 influenza season, which in a normal year often doesn't start until November and peaks the following February. Global health authorities asked vaccine makers to make a separate H1N1 vaccine.

Nancy Cox, the director of the influenza division at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told the panel that the new H1N1 strain is still the dominant strain circulating globally. In recent weeks, however, China has been affected by an influenza outbreak caused by another type of "B" strain.

Each year's seasonal flu vaccine is comprised of three different strains to protect people against the most common types of influenza viruses seen around the world in a given year. The vaccines typically contain two "A" influenza strains that include a H1N1 subtype and a H3N2 subtype and one "B" strain.

For the 2010-2011 flu season, the FDA panel recommended that both "A" strains used in the current seasonal vaccine be changed, with one of the strains being designed to protect against the H1N1 pandemic strain. They recommended that the current "B" strain remain unchanged.

More than 57 million Americans have been sickened by the H1N1 pandemic. While the number of illnesses has declined since last fall, health officials said they are still seeing transmission of the virus.

The FDA panel recommendation follows a similar recommendation made last week by the World Health Organization for the Northern Hemisphere. Each year, the FDA must sign off on any strain changes and approve influenza vaccine made by various companies for the coming influenza season.

The CDC and the World Health Organization routinely monitor influenza viruses and report on which strains are predominant. Health officials use that information to pick the three strains most likely to offer protection against dominant strains of influenza expected to be circulating during the upcoming flu season. More than 10,000 viruses can cause the flu.

Influenza vaccines are grown in chicken eggs and are made by several companies including Sanofi Pasteur, a unit of [Sanofi-Aventis](#) SA; [Novartis](#) AG; [GlaxoSmithKline](#) PLC; MedImmune, a unit of [AstraZeneca](#) PLC; and [CSL](#) Ltd.

It takes about eight months for the entire influenza-vaccine production process to be completed, meaning manufacturers usually start making one part of the vaccine in January in order for the finished product to start being shipped in late August. Manufacturers typically then wait for decisions in February from health officials in the Northern Hemisphere to start working on the other two strains.

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