

# Influenza H1N1

## Summary

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This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Flash EB Series #287

## **Eurobarometer on Influenza H1N1**

Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization,  
Hungary upon the request of the  
European Commission,  
Directorate-General for Health and Consumers



Coordinated by Directorate-General  
Communication

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**THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION**

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Main Findings .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1. Vaccination against seasonal influenza .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
2. Awareness of pandemic H1N1 2009 (swine flu).....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3. Worries and beliefs about pandemic H1N1 2009.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.1. Concerns that pandemic H1N1 2009 may develop into a serious risk.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.2. Probability of personally catching influenza H1N1.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.3. Pandemic H1N1 2009 in comparison to regular seasonal influenza.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
4. Level of information about pandemic influenza H1N1 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
5. Trust in sources of information about pandemic H1N1 2009 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
6. Pandemic H1N1 2009 in the media.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7. Measures against pandemic H1N1 2009.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7.1. Knowledge of preventive measures that can be taken by people themselves.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7.2. Behavioural changes to protect against pandemic H1N1 2009 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7.3. Satisfaction with preventive measures taken by authorities against influenza.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7.4. Consideration of measures taken in other countries to manage pandemic H1N1 2009.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
8. Opinions about the vaccination against influenza H1N1.....	12
8.1. Seasonal influenza vaccination as protection against H1N1 influenza.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
8.2. Sources of information about the H1N1 influenza vaccine.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
8.3. Probability of getting vaccinated against the pandemic H1N1 2009 and the reasons behind specific behaviours .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
8.4. Effectiveness and safety of the pandemic H1N1 2009 vaccine.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
8.5. Groups who are most at risk for catching pandemic H1N1 2009.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Annex tables .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Survey details.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Survey Questionnaire .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## Introduction

“Influenza is a highly contagious viral disease, which typically occurs as an epidemic during the cold months. Serious human influenza epidemics are rare, but recurrently they are more severe than the normal seasonal outbreaks, in which case they are also called pandemics. A pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and starts spreading all around the world as easily as normal influenza”<sup>1</sup>.

The pandemic H1N1 2009 is a global outbreak of a new strain of influenza A virus subtype H1N1, colloquially known as swine flu, Mexican influenza or influenza A. The outbreak was first observed in Mexico; as the virus quickly spread globally since April 2009, WHO declared the outbreak to be a pandemic on 10 June 2009. Only mild symptoms are experienced by the overwhelming majority of victims, but there are exceptions. There are small subsets of patients, even among young persons previously healthy, in which the patient rapidly develops severe pneumonia and some die.

The European Commission is facilitating the EU coordination response to pandemic H1N1 2009.

It is in this context that the Directorate-General for Health and Consumers commissioned a survey that examines public opinion about influenza and pandemic H1N1 2009. The Flash Eurobarometer survey - “FL287 – Influenza H1N1” – covered the following issues:

- The intention to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza this year
- Awareness of pandemic H1N1 influenza (swine flu)
- Worries and beliefs about pandemic H1N1 2009
- Level of information about pandemic H1N1 2009
- Trust in sources of information about pandemic H1N1 2009
- Pandemic H1N1 2009 in the media
- Measures against pandemic H1N1 2009
- Opinions about the vaccination against H1N1 influenza

The survey’s fieldwork was carried out between the 26 and 30 November 2009. Over 28,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 years and over were interviewed across the 27 EU Member States, as well as in Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. The survey was conducted by telephone, with WebCATI (web-based computer assisted telephone interviewing). To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on socio-demographic variables.

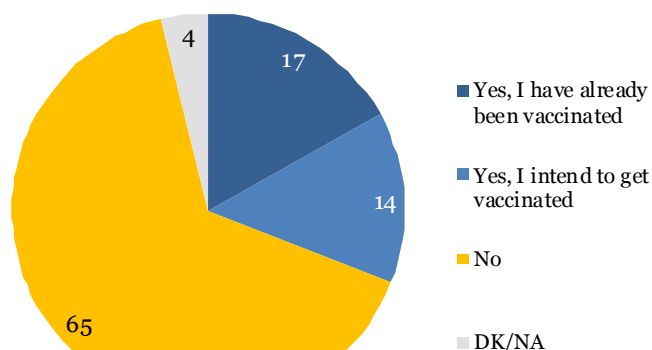
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<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/health\\_problems/avian\\_influenza/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/health_problems/avian_influenza/index_en.htm)

## 1. Vaccination against seasonal influenza

The survey asked respondents whether or not they intended to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza this year. Three out of 10 respondents (31%) surveyed supported a vaccine against seasonal influenza: 17% stated that they “*had already been vaccinated*”, and 14% of survey participants “*intended to get vaccinated*”. However, a majority-- almost two-thirds-- of EU citizens (65%) said they had no intention of getting vaccinated against seasonal influenza. An additional 4% did not voice their opinion on this matter. There were some variations between countries: the intention to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza was the most widespread among Romanians (40%) while in Portugal and France only 8% planned to get immunized.

**Intent to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza this year**



**Q1. Do you intend to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza this year?**

Base: all respondents, % EU27

## 2. Awareness of pandemic H1N1 2009 (swine flu)

Awareness of the pandemic influenza H1N1 was very widespread among survey participants (98%). Moreover, the vast majority of those familiar with influenza H1N1 were informed about it: 86% of respondents said that they had heard about the swine influenza and knew what it meant.

Those most informed about the influenza H1N1 were the citizens of Iceland: 97% stated that they had heard of the pandemic influenza and that they knew what it meant. They were followed by the Swiss (96%) and the Finns (95%). In contrast, approximately only two in three respondents (68%) in Bulgaria were familiar with the swine influenza and knew what it meant. Lower proportions of those knowledgeable about the influenza H1N1 were recorded in Estonia (74%) and Cyprus (77%).

## 3. Worries and beliefs about pandemic H1N1 2009

### 3.1. Concerns that pandemic H1N1 2009 may develop into a serious risk

The survey asked respondents whether or not they were concerned that the pandemic influenza might develop into a serious risk in their countries.

Over a half of EU citizens (57%) were not concerned. The worry that influenza H1N1 might transform into a serious risk was shared by two-fifths of respondents (41%) (one third were *quite concerned* and 8% were *very much concerned*). No one considered the pandemic influenza to be *a serious risk already*.

In a third of the countries (10 out of 30) under survey, the proportion of those either “*very much*” or “*quite concerned*” that the pandemic influenza might develop into a serious risk outnumbered those that had no worries in this regard<sup>2</sup>. In most of the countries, however, the majority of citizens were not concerned about a serious risk.

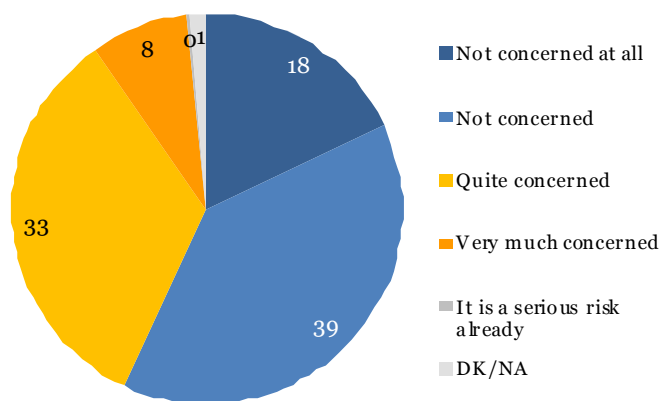
On the “not concerned” end were Austria and Switzerland (both 73%; 16 percentage points above the EU average), Spain and Norway (both 72%), Luxembourg (71%) and Denmark (70%).

The Irish were the most fearful: 68% (27 percentage points above the EU average) of survey participants in Ireland were *very much or quite concerned* that the influenza H1N1 might develop into a serious risk; only three out of 10 Irish (31%) were not concerned. Estonia, the Czech Republic (both 60%) and Romania (59%) all had high ratios of people worried (*very much or quite concerned*) that the pandemic influenza might become a serious problem.

### 3.2. Probability of personally catching influenza H1N1

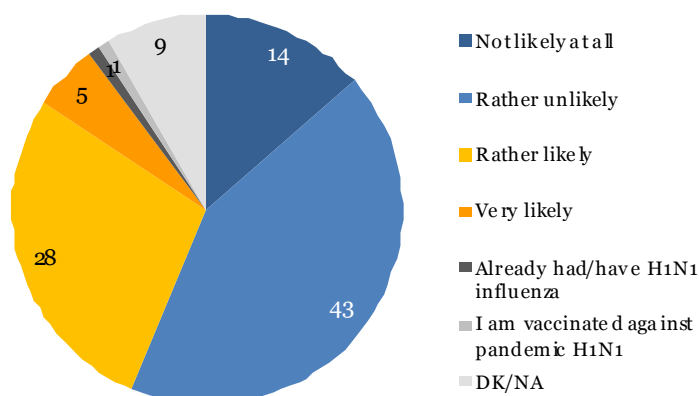
The survey asked respondents whether they thought they were likely to personally contact pandemic H1N1 2009. A majority (57%) of EU citizens believed it was unlikely that they would personally catch the influenza H1N1: 14% considered such a scenario *not likely at all*, and an additional two-fifths (43%) thought it was *rather unlikely* that they would become infected with the H1N1 virus. However, one out of three respondents (33%)

**Concern that the pandemic H1N1 2009 may develop into a serious risk**



**Q3. How concerned are you that the pandemic/swine (H1N1) flu may develop into a serious risk in [OUR COUNTRY]?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU27

**Likelihood of personally catching influenza H1N1**



**Q4. How likely do you think it is that you, personally, will catch pandemic (H1N1) flu?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU27

<sup>2</sup> These countries are: BG, CZ, EE, IE, LV.

considered it likely that they would personally be infected.

There were only 6 countries out of 30 where the proportion of people worried about personally catching the influenza H1N1 was higher than the ratio of those not worried<sup>3</sup>.

Austrians were the least worried about catching the swine influenza. A large majority of eight in 10 respondents in Austria (82%; 25 percentage points above the EU average) thought it was *not likely at all or rather unlikely* that they personally would contract pandemic influenza. Hungarians (70%), and respondents in Germany and Poland (69% and 68%, respectively) shared a similar view. On the other hand, more than half of respondents in Malta (56%; 23 percentage points on EU average) believed it was *very or rather likely* that they would personally catch the H1N1 influenza; only one in four (25%) considered this *not likely at all or a rather unlikely* event. Next to the Maltese, the Cypriots (54%) and Portuguese (52%) were among those most concerned about personally contracting the pandemic influenza (*very and rather likely*).

### **3.3. Pandemic H1N1 2009 in comparison to regular seasonal influenza**

Asked to state their opinion on how dangerous the pandemic influenza H1N1 was compared to the regular seasonal influenza, a relative majority of EU citizens said the two were equally dangerous (47%). But almost three in 10 respondents (29%) believed the pandemic influenza was more threatening than seasonal influenza, and one in 10 had an opposite view – 11% considered regular seasonal influenza to be more dangerous than the influenza H1N1.

## **4. Level of information about pandemic influenza H1N1**

When asked how informed they felt about the influenza H1N1, a total of three-quarters of the interviewees considered themselves informed. Over half felt *well informed* (56%), and a further one-fifth felt *very well informed* (19%).

Another one-fifth of EU citizens felt they were *not very well informed* about the swine influenza (21%), while only a small proportion (3%) said they were *not at all informed* about the pandemic influenza H1N1.

Over half of the public felt *well or very well informed* about the H1N1 influenza in all the countries researched – with the exception of Lithuania, where the majority of respondents (54%) felt insufficiently informed about this issue, and only 43% of them felt well or very well informed. The other two Baltic states were also among the countries where relatively few citizens felt informed about the swine influenza (51% in Latvia and 57% in Estonia felt informed). Two-thirds of the public felt informed about the influenza H1N1 in Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic (all 66%) and Greece (67%).

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<sup>3</sup> These countries are: BG, CY, LT, MT, PT, and NO.

## 5. Trust in sources of information about pandemic H1N1 2009

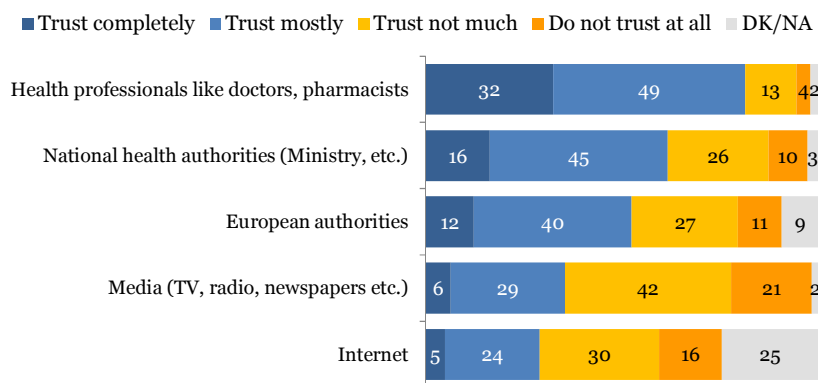
The survey results show that EU citizens have the most trust in **health professionals** like doctors and pharmacists when it comes to information about the H1N1 influenza. A third of EU citizens said they *completely trusted* health professionals to inform them about the H1N1 influenza (32%) and a further half of citizens *mostly* trusted them in this regard (49%). Only 17% of the interviewees do *not much trust* or *do not at all trust* health professionals as sources of information about the influenza H1N1.

**National health authorities** (such as Ministries, etc) and **European authorities** ranked as the second and third most trusted sources of information on the pandemic influenza; 61% of respondents would *completely* or *mostly* trust national authorities when presenting such information and 52% would trust information received from European authorities.

The **media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc)** were less trusted by EU citizens; only slightly over a third of respondents (35%) said either that they trusted the media *completely* (6%) or *mostly* (29%) to inform them about the pandemic influenza H1N1. Almost two-thirds of people (63%) did not trust the media *at all* (21%) or *not much* (42%) as a source of information on pandemic influenza H1N1.

Finally, the **Internet** was the least trusted source of information about the swine influenza (but not very far behind the media). Only 29% of interviewees said they trusted the information they could find on the Internet about the influenza H1N1. On the other hand, as much as 25% were not sure whether or not to trust information available on the Internet (or did not want to answer the question).

### Trust in information sources for the pandemic H1N1 2009



Q10. How much do you trust each of the following sources to inform you about the pandemic (H1N1) flu?  
Base: all respondents, % EU27

## 6. Pandemic H1N1 2009 in the media

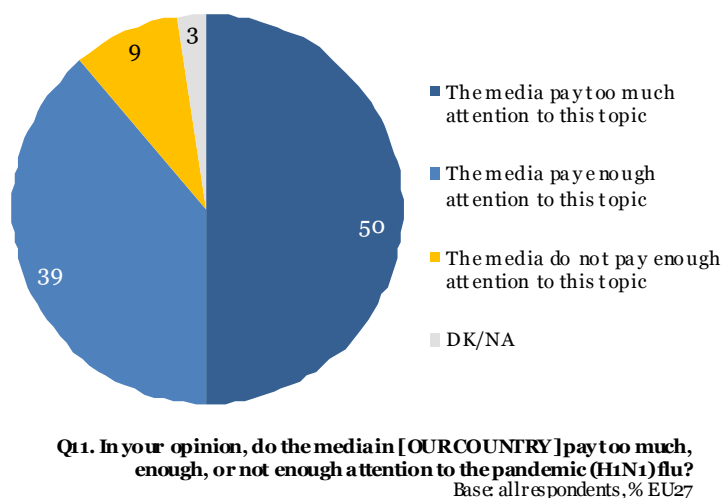
The survey also measured citizens' feelings about how the media in their country focused on the topic of H1N1 influenza. Half of the public in EU Member States felt that the media paid too much attention to the swine influenza (50%), while a much smaller percentage (9%) felt the opposite – i.e. that the media did not pay enough attention to the influenza. About two-fifth of citizens thought that the media in their



country paid enough attention to the influenza (39%). Only a few citizens had no opinion on this matter (3%).

Over half of citizens in nine countries felt that the media in their country paid *too much attention* to the issue of H1N1 influenza; this was the case in France (72%), Sweden (70%), Portugal, Norway (both 66%), Italy (64%), Greece (59%), Cyprus (54%), Hungary (53%) and Spain (52%), and the relative majority (from 46% to 49%) felt the same way in further six countries.

**Pandemic H1N1 2009 in the media**



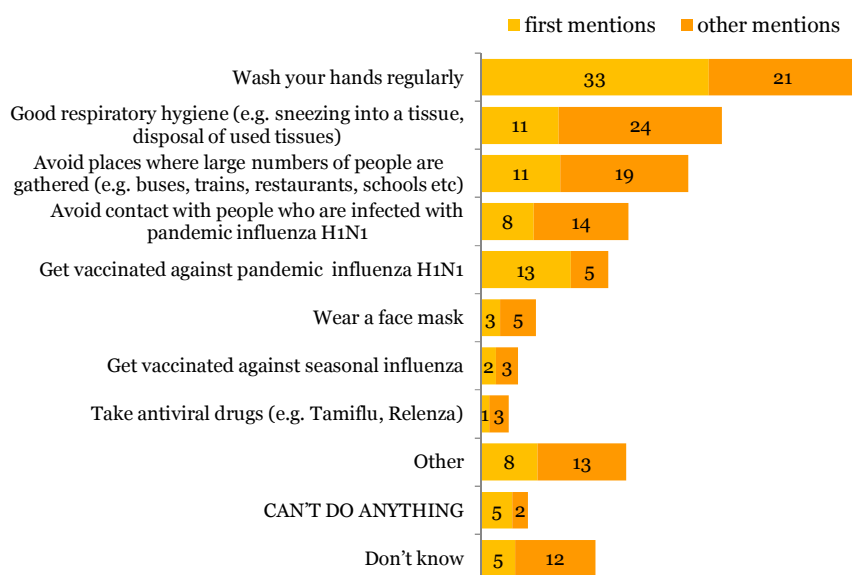
In the other half of the countries surveyed, the dominant opinion was that the media paid *enough attention* to the influenza H1N1. The majority of respondents in Luxembourg (63%), Iceland (60%), Estonia, Ireland (both 57%), Finland (56%), the Czech Republic, Romania (both 55%), Slovenia (54%), Poland (53%) and Denmark (51%) felt that way, while in a further four countries the relative majority of interviewees shared this opinion.

## 7. Measures against pandemic H1N1 2009

### 7.1. Knowledge of preventive measures that can be taken by people themselves

Asked to spontaneously state what people themselves could do to protect themselves against the pandemic influenza H1N1, one-third of EU citizens first mentioned “*wash your hands regularly*” (33%). Roughly one in 10 respondents gave as their first response “*get vaccinated against pandemic influenza H1N1*” (13%). “*Avoid places where large numbers of people are gathered (e.g. buses, trains, cinemas, bars, restaurants, schools etc)*” and “*good respiratory hygiene (e.g. sneezing into a tissue, disposal of used tissues)*” were both mentioned by 11%. An additional 8% of survey participants offered as their first answer “*avoiding contact with people who were infected with pandemic influenza H1N1*”. Fewer respondents thought to mention “*wearing a face mask*” (3%), “*getting vaccinated against seasonal influenza*” (2%) or “*taking antiviral drugs (e.g. Tamiflu, Relenza)*” (1%).

### What can people do to protect themselves against the pandemic influenza H1N1?

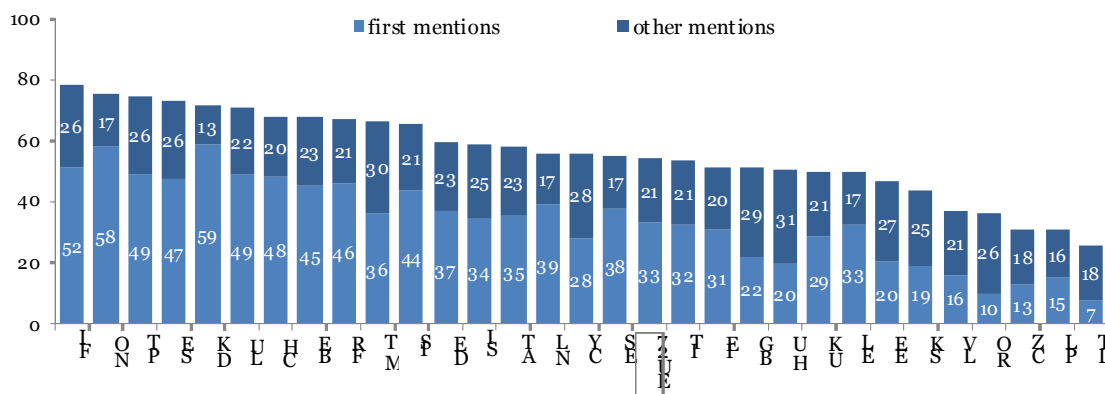


Q7. In general, what can people do to protect themselves against the pandemic H1N1 flu?

Base: all respondents, % EU27

Certain protective behaviours were much more popular in some countries than in others. Looking at the preventative measure of “hand washing” we saw that approximately three-quarters of respondents in Finland (78%; 24 percentage points above EU average), Norway and Portugal (75%) mentioned “*washing their hands regularly*.” In contrast, only one in four Lithuanians (25%; 29 percentage points below EU average) and three in 10 Polish and Czech respondents (both 31%) named this measure (first and other mentions). It is worth mentioning that over half of those in Denmark (59%), Norway (58%) and Finland (52%) mentioned as their first answer washing hands regularly for protect themselves against the influenza H1N1.

#### Prevention: Wash your hands regularly



Q7. In general, what can people do to protect themselves against the pandemic H1N1 flu?

Base: all respondents, % by country

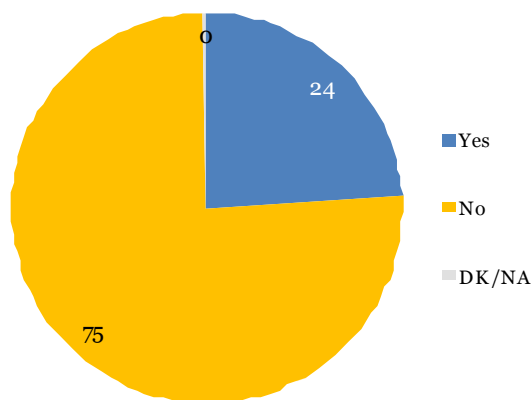
## 7.2. Behavioural changes to protect against pandemic H1N1 2009

Asked about changes in their behaviour, approximately one in four EU citizens (24%) stated that their behaviour had changed in order to protect themselves against pandemic H1N1 2009. However, a majority of three-quarters of respondents had not changed their behaviour (75%).

Six out of 10 Maltese (60%; 36 percentage points above EU average) and approximately a half of the Irish (53%) had changed their behaviour to protect themselves against pandemic H1N1 2009. Higher proportions of people who did the same were recorded as well in Bulgaria (44%) and Finland (41%). On the other hand, less than one-fifth of respondents Spain (14%; 10 percentage points below EU average), Austria (15%) and Poland (17%) said their behaviour had changed as a preventative measure against H1N1 influenza.

Except in Malta and Ireland, in all other countries under survey, the majority of citizens (between 55% in Bulgaria and 86% in Spain) had not changed their behaviour to protect themselves against pandemic influenza.

**Behavioural changes to protect against pandemic H1N1 2009**



**Q8. Have you changed your behaviour to protect yourself against pandemic (H1N1) flu?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU 27

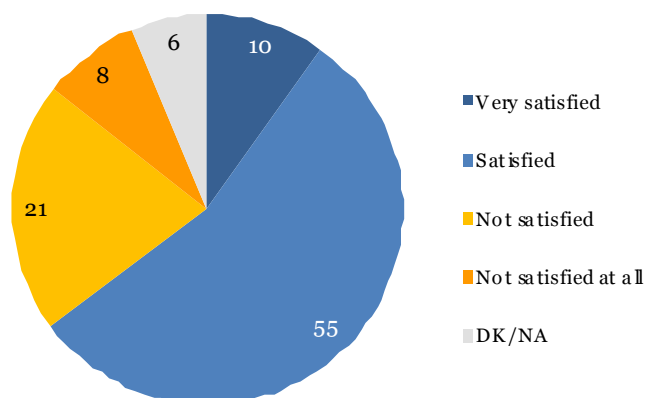
## 7.3. Satisfaction with preventive measures taken by authorities against pandemic H1N1 2009

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the preventive measures authorities in their countries had taken so far against pandemic influenza.

About two-thirds of EU citizens were satisfied (65%) with the way authorities in their countries tried to prevent the spread of the influenza H1N1. More precisely one in 10 survey participants was *very satisfied* and 55% were *satisfied*.

One-fifth of respondents were *not satisfied* by the preventive measures

**Satisfaction with taken preventive measures against pandemic H1N1 2009**



**Q12. Based on what you know, how satisfied are you with the preventive measures that authorities in [OUR COUNTRY] have taken so far against pandemic (H1N1) flu?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU 27

taken so far in their countries (21%) and an additional 8% were *not satisfied at all* in this respect.

Except in a few EU Member States, the majority of citizens were *satisfied or very satisfied* with the preventive measures their countries had taken so far against the pandemic H1N1 2009. Roughly eight out of 10 interviewees in Denmark (85%; 20 percentage points above EU average), the Netherlands (83%), Luxembourg (82%) and the UK (81%) were satisfied with the preventive measures they knew about. Over three-quarters of citizens were content with such measures in a further eight countries (Slovenia, Belgium, Iceland, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Malta and Ireland – between 76% and 79% of citizens in these countries were *satisfied or very satisfied*).

#### 7.4. Consideration of measures taken in other countries to manage pandemic H1N1 2009

The survey asked whether respondents paid attention to measures and decisions other countries were taking to manage the pandemic H1N1 2009. Over half of EU citizens were interested in other countries' approaches to protecting people against the pandemic influenza (53%). Two-fifths of interviewees (39%) were *somewhat* concerned about what other countries did in this regard, and 14% said they paid *quite a lot* of attention to the measures and decisions taken by other countries to manage the influenza H1N1. 44% were *not interested* in what other countries were doing against the spread of the influenza H1N1.

## 8. Opinions about the vaccination against influenza H1N1

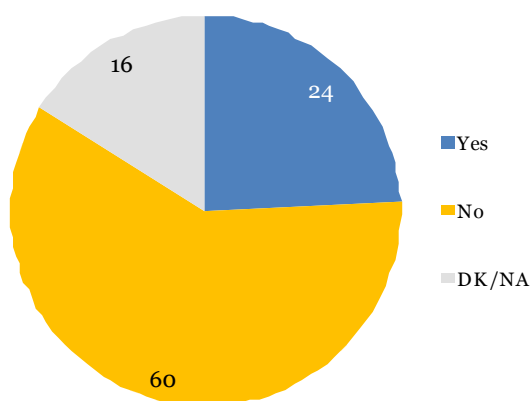
### 8.1. Seasonal influenza vaccination as protection against H1N1 influenza

Respondents were asked whether or not they thought the seasonal influenza vaccination would provide effective protection against H1N1 influenza.

A majority of respondents in the EU did not believe that the seasonal influenza vaccination would provide them protection against the influenza H1N1 (60%). However, overall nearly 1 in 4 believed that it would (24%), and 1 in 6 did not know (16%).

There were five countries in which roughly a third of respondents believed that the seasonal influenza shot would offer protection against H1N1: those were Cyprus (36%; +12 percentage points above EU average), Romania (35%), Malta, Greece and Ireland (33% each). Over two-thirds of respondents believed that

**Seasonal influenza vaccination provide protection against the H1N1 influenza**



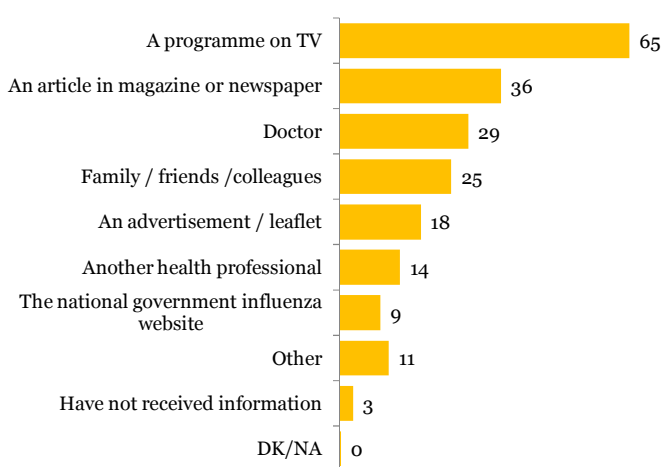
**Q14. Do you think that the seasonal flu vaccination will provide protection against the H1N1 flu?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU 27

the seasonal influenza vaccine could not prevent influenza H1N1 in Sweden (72%; 12 percentage points above EU average), Luxembourg (71%), France (70%), as well as in Denmark (69%), Austria and Switzerland (both 68%). In Lithuania, Portugal, Bulgaria and Poland close to a quarter of respondents did not know whether or not the seasonal influenza shot was effective against H1N1 (28%, 25-25% and 23% respectively.)

## 8.2. Sources of information about the H1N1 influenza vaccine

When asked about the source from which they received information on the influenza H1N1 vaccine, respondents all over Europe were most likely to mention T.V. programmes. The majority of respondents (65%) said they received information about the H1N1 vaccine from a programme on T.V. Over a third of survey participants mentioned newspaper or magazine articles (36%), while 29% said that they had received information from a doctor and a quarter mentioned informal sources such as family, friends or colleagues. Nearly a fifth of respondents (18%) also mentioned advertisements and leaflets and 14% recalled “another health professional” apart from a doctor. Almost 1 in 10 respondents used the national government’s influenza website (9%) and 11% mentioned “other sources”. Only 3% said that they had received no information about the H1N1 vaccine at all.

**Source of information about the H1N1 influenza vaccine**



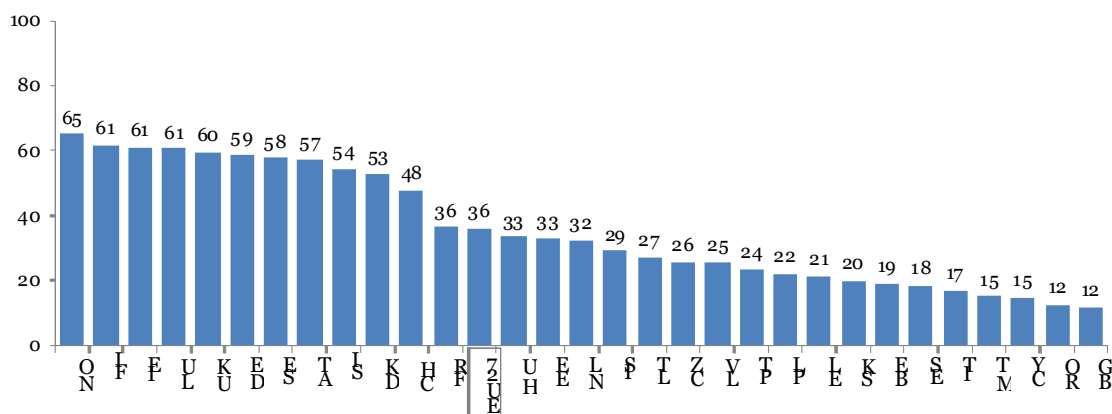
**Q15. From whom or where have you received information about the H1N1 vaccine?**

Base: all respondents, % EU27

Countries differed somewhat in what sources of information they mentioned most frequently in relation to information about the pandemic H1N1 2009. One of the sources on which countries most differed was magazine or newspaper articles. In 10 countries, a clear majority of respondents mentioned receiving information about the H1N1 vaccine from magazine or newspaper articles. These countries were Norway (65%), Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg (each 61%), the UK (60%), Germany, Sweden, and Austria, (59%, 58% and 57% respectively), Slovenia and Denmark (54% and 53% respectively). Closely following them was Switzerland with 48% of its citizens naming articles in magazines as sources of information. Less than 1 in 5 respondents were informed about the H1N1 vaccine from articles in

Belgium, Spain and Italy (19%, 18% and 17%, respectively), Malta and Cyprus (both 15%), as well as in Romania and Bulgaria (both 12%).

Source : **An article in magazine or newspaper**



Q15. From whom or where have you received information about the H1N1 vaccine?

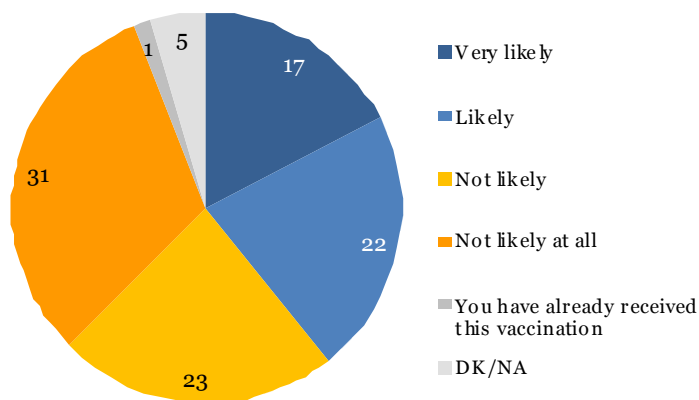
Base: all respondents, % by country

### 8.3. Probability of getting vaccinated against the pandemic H1N1 2009 and the reasons behind specific behaviours

The survey asked respondents how likely it was that they would get vaccinated against H1N1 if the vaccine was available to them.

Only 1 percent of respondents reported that they had already received the vaccine against the pandemic influenza. Overall, a majority of respondents (54%) said that it was not likely (or not at all likely) that they would get vaccinated. Nearly a third of respondents (31%) said that it was “not likely at all” that they would choose to get vaccinated against the influenza H1N1. On the other hand, approximately two-fifths of respondents (39%) said that they would likely (very likely or likely) get vaccinated if the vaccine was available, and slightly less than one in 6 (17%) said that they would “very likely” get vaccinated against the pandemic influenza.

#### Likelihood of getting vaccinated against the pandemic H1N1 2009



Q16. If the vaccine were available to you, how likely would you be to get vaccinated against the pandemic (H1N1) flu?

Base: all respondents, % EU27

Looking at the perceived likelihood of getting vaccinated on a country-by-country level, we saw great differences in the proportions of those who said they were likely and those who said they were unlikely to receive the vaccination. The highest proportion of those who said they would be “very likely” or “likely” to get vaccinated if the vaccine was available to them were found in Malta (67%) and Romania (66%) where two-thirds of respondents said they would likely get vaccinated against the pandemic influenza. This proportion was similarly high in Lithuania (61%), Ireland (60%), Estonia (59%) and the UK (58%).

On the other hand, less than one quarter in Austria (22%) and Luxembourg (23%), and less than a third in France (25%), Italy (27%), as well as in Spain, Hungary and Switzerland (all 29%) said that it was likely (or very likely) that they would get vaccinated.

Overall, in most countries, between 60% and 80% of those who reported that they were likely to get vaccinated against the influenza H1N1 said that they would get vaccinated because they believed that it will protect them against influenza. This proportion was somewhat higher in Malta, where 89 percent mentioned that the vaccine would protect them, and lower in Denmark (57%), the Netherlands (51%), Switzerland (49%) and Belgium (47%).

#### **8.4. Effectiveness and safety of the pandemic H1N1 2009 vaccine**

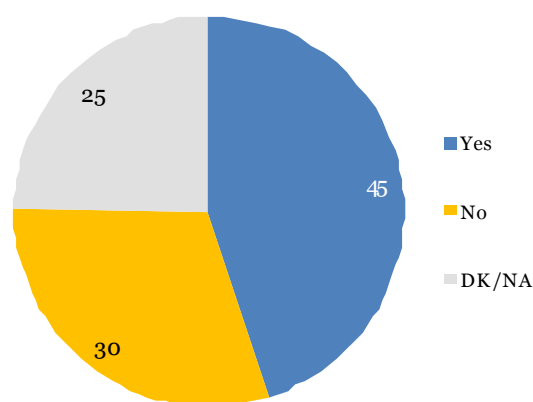
Respondents were asked of their opinion on the effectiveness and safeness of the H1N1 influenza vaccine. 45% of respondents said that they believed it would be safe.

Slightly less than a third of respondents (30%) believed that the H1N1 vaccine would not be effective and safe, and a quarter of survey participants did not know or did not want to answer.

Looking at the variations by country in beliefs about the effectiveness and safeness of the H1N1 vaccine, we found that in 6 countries, at least two-thirds of respondents believed the vaccine would be effective and safe. These were Norway (70%), Iceland and Ireland (69% both), as well as Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands (68%, 67% and 66% respectively). They were followed by the U.K. with 62%. In contrast, less than a third of respondents in Greece (32%), France (30%) and Latvia (27%) believed that the H1N1 vaccine would be effective and safe.

Over 4 in 10 respondents in Latvia (48%) France (43%) and Luxembourg (42%) said they did not believe the vaccine would be effective and safe, compared with only 9% in Ireland, 11% in the U.K. and 12 and 13% in Norway and Iceland, respectively. Close to a third of respondents in Lithuania (38%), Malta (33%), Portugal and Spain (both 30%) did not know or could not give an answer.

**Will pandemic H1N1 2009 vaccine be effective and safe?**



**Q18. Do you believe the pandemic (H1N1) flu vaccine will be effective and safe or not?**  
Base: all respondents, % EU 27

### ***8.5. Groups who are most at risk for catching pandemic H1N1 2009***

Respondents were asked about what groups they thought to be most at risk for contracting H1N1 influenza. Over half (57%) of respondents believed that people with chronic illnesses (such as heart disease) and half of respondents thought that the elderly (those aged 65 and over) were most at risk for catching pandemic H1N1 2009. Nearly 4 in 10 respondents (39%) also mentioned children under 14, while a quarter (26%) said babies, and a fifth considered pregnant women (20%) and healthcare workers (19%) to be at risk. A small number (2%) thought that men were more at risk and an equally small number (2%) considered women to be at risk. “Other” groups were mentioned by 7% and 4% of respondents did not have an answer.