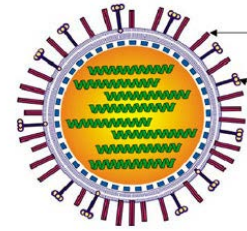


Influenza during Pregnancy



Influenza virus

What is the best way to protect myself from the flu?

Pregnancy can affect your immune system and also put extra stress on your heart and lungs. As a result, you may be at increased risk of getting not only the flu but also of developing serious complications including pneumonia. In addition, pregnant women with the flu are sicker and far more likely than nonpregnant women with the flu to require hospitalization for complications.

The best way to protect yourself against the flu is to take general precautions (good hand washing, avoiding anyone who is ill, getting adequate rest, eating a healthy diet) and to be vaccinated. About 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.

Who is at high risk for the flu?

People in the following groups have a high risk of getting flu:



- Children aged 6 months until their 5th birthday,
- Pregnant women and nursing mothers of young children
- People 50 years of age and older, and
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions;
- People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities

Other people at high risk include those who are exposed to anyone who has the flu or is high risk for the flu:

- Household contacts of anyone who is high risk for flu or complications from the flu (see above)
- Household contacts/day care providers/babysitters of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)
- Healthcare workers.

How can I tell if I have the flu?

You should see a healthcare provider if you develop the following symptoms:

- Muscle aches and pains
- Persistent high fever (over 100.4)
- Headache
- Cough
- Extreme fatigue
- Possibly nausea and vomiting and diarrhea.



Symptoms may worsen over time. Be sure to contact your doctor/nurse midwife/nurse practitioner if you experience a persistent fever of 100.4 or higher with headache, cough and muscle aches. A treatment plan will be decided after your health care provider determines if you have any additional risk factors. Be sure to report any history of asthma, contacts with sick individuals and complications of previous pregnancies.

What should I do if I think I have the flu?

Influenza should not be confused with a common cold or sniffles. If you experience cough, headache, muscle aches and fever, you might be experiencing a viral illness like the flu. Acetaminophen is good for fever and muscle pain. Robitussin may help with the cough. Adequate fluids like water, sport drinks like Gatorade and fruit juices are good choices for liquids. Rest, careful hand washing and watching for the more serious side effects of the flu are important.

What are the more serious side effects of influenza during pregnancy?

Although not very common, pneumonia and premature labor can occur in the pregnant woman with influenza.

Is it safe to get flu shot during pregnancy?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends flu shots with inactivated vaccine for all women who are pregnant during flu season, as well as nursing mothers and mothers of children younger than 6 months. Because the flu shot is made from killed (inactivated) influenza virus, it is considered safe during any stage of pregnancy.



When should I get vaccinated?

The peak flu season is usually November to March. October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you should still get vaccinated beyond the normal season. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May or June.

There are two types of vaccines:

- The "flu shot"—an inactivated vaccine (meaning it does not contain live virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot can be used for anyone older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions, as well as pregnant women.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – this is a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. The nasal spray vaccine is approved for use in healthy people 2-49 years of age. It is



not safe in pregnancy.

Each vaccine contains three influenza viruses. The viruses in the vaccine change each year based on scientists' predictions about which types and strains of viruses will be most active in a coming year. In some cases of new flu virus strains such as the Swine Flu, a vaccine may not be available. About 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.

Who should not be vaccinated?

There are some women who should not be vaccinated. Do not take a flu shot if you:

- Have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- Have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- Developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Have a moderate or severe illness with a fever. Come back for the vaccine when you are recovered.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are: soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given; fever (low grade) and body aches. If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days. Almost all people who receive influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

How effective is the vaccine?

The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine, and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those the person is exposed to. Testing has shown that the flu shot is effective at preventing the flu, although new variations of the disease may not be prevented.

What should I do to prevent getting the flu if there is no vaccine available?

Try to leave the home as little as possible. If you must leave your home have antiseptic hand cleanser available to use while you are out and about in the community. The use of face masks may not be very effective in public places. Careful hand washing is extremely important. Wash your hands frequently during the day, especially before eating and after covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Wiping down the bathroom faucets, telephones, keyboards, etc once a day may offer additional protection.

