

Influenza vaccination in pregnancy

Why should pregnant women get the flu vaccine?

To help protect themselves - Getting the flu can cause serious problems when you are pregnant.

Even if you are generally healthy, changes in immune, heart and lung functions during pregnancy make you more likely to get seriously ill from the flu.

Pregnant women who get the flu are at a higher risk of hospitalisation and even death than non-pregnant women.

To help protect their baby - When you get your flu vaccination your body makes antibodies that help protect you against the flu. Antibodies can be passed on to your unborn baby and help protect your baby for up to six months after they are born.

This is important as babies younger than six months are too young to get the flu vaccine. Babies are less likely to be hospitalised from flu-related illness if their mother has been immunised against the flu during their pregnancy.

Severe illness during pregnancy can also be dangerous to the unborn baby because it increases the chance of serious problems such as premature labour.

Risk of stillbirth is reduced in pregnant women immunised against flu.

When should the flu vaccine be given during pregnancy?

The flu vaccine is safe and can be given at any time during your pregnancy. If you are pregnant, you should talk to your healthcare provider about the best time in the year to get the flu vaccine.

Where can pregnant women receive the flu vaccine?

Free flu vaccine is available through GPs (a consultation fee may apply) or some local council immunisation sessions.

Is the flu vaccine safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies?

Yes. The flu vaccine is safe to give in all stages of pregnancy. International studies on the safety of the vaccine show no evidence of harm to the unborn baby from vaccinating pregnant women.

Are there side effects?

Some people have mild side effects after receiving the flu vaccine, such as soreness or redness at the injection site; mild fever or muscle aches. If mild reactions do occur, they generally go away within one or two days.

Talk to your immunisation provider about what to expect and how you can manage these mild side effects if they do occur.

Is it safe for pregnant women to have the flu vaccine and pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine at the same time?

Yes, you can get the flu vaccine and pertussis vaccine at the same time during your pregnancy.

Discuss the best timing for both vaccines with your healthcare provider as the pertussis vaccine needs to be given in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Can the flu vaccine give you or your baby flu?

No. The flu vaccine does not contain any live virus. It cannot give you or your unborn baby the flu.

If you had the flu vaccine when you were pregnant does your infant still need the flu vaccine at six months?

Yes. Flu vaccination during pregnancy is an important way to protect yourself and your child in the first few months of their life.

Unfortunately, the protection for your baby does not last beyond six months so it is recommended children from this age are vaccinated for flu.

Ways to help protect against flu

- The best way to help prevent flu is to have the flu vaccine. The vaccine is required every year because the flu virus is constantly changing. This will also help protect your baby, family, friends and colleagues.
- Good habits can also reduce the chance of getting flu or passing it to others. These include:
 - regular hand washing with soap and water
 - not sharing personal items such as cups or cutlery
 - covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid those who have symptoms of flu if possible.
- Flu vaccination is recommended for all people unless medically contraindicated. Encourage

partners, family, friends and child care workers to have their flu vaccination as well.

For further information:

- Speak to your doctor or clinic nurse
- See the DHHS flu website www.flu.tas.gov.au
- Call the Public Health Hotline - Tasmania on **1800 671 738** to speak to clinical nurse consultant.
- Call Immunise Australia on 1800 671 811 or visit www.immunise.health.gov.au

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