

Audience: Pregnant Women

CDC 2011-2012 Flu Season

Word Count: 551

Pregnant? Protect Your Baby and Yourself – Get a Flu Shot

Your mood can change on a dime. Your feet are swollen, you have heartburn, you can't sleep, and you can't stay away from the bathroom for longer than fifteen minutes. A lot of discomforts come with the joy of pregnancy. Adding the flu to that could be overwhelming, or much worse. Pregnant women who get the flu are at risk for serious illness that could harm them or their unborn child. But there's one step you can take to protect both of you from the flu: get a flu vaccine.

The risk of serious complications from the flu is greater for pregnant women because pregnancy can reduce the ability of the lungs and the immune system to work normally. This makes pregnant women more likely to become severely ill with the flu than women who are not pregnant. This can be bad for both you and your baby—pregnant women with the flu also have a greater chance for serious problems for their unborn baby, including premature labor and delivery.

While CDC is recommending that everyone get vaccinated against the flu this and every season, the agency has a special message for pregnant women: "Please don't pass up this chance to protect yourself and your baby against the flu," says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC's Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

"Getting a flu vaccine during pregnancy can reduce the risk of getting the flu while pregnant and after," says Dr. Schuchat. "And babies younger than six months can get very sick from the flu, but are too young to get vaccinated." The best way to protect them is to have their caregivers and close contacts vaccinated, and for their mother to get the flu shot during pregnancy. Studies have shown that getting a flu shot during pregnancy can decrease your baby's chance of getting the flu for up to 6 months after birth.

"Pregnant women should get flu shots, not the nasal spray vaccine," says Dr. Schuchat. "The flu shot is given in a single dose, and is safe, effective, and cannot cause the flu." Schuchat adds that the vaccine can be safely given during any month of pregnancy and is also safe for breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding mothers can get either the nasal spray vaccine or a flu shot.

Seasonal flu shots have been given safely to millions of pregnant women over many years. As in previous years, vaccine companies are making plenty of preservative-free flu vaccine as an option for pregnant women and small children. Your flu shot will provide protection that lasts throughout the season, even if you get vaccinated early in the season.

Usually worse than the common cold, the flu can cause fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and weakness. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. If you think you may have the flu, it's important to call your doctor or nurse right away. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medicines (antiviral drugs) to reduce the severity of your flu illness and shorten the length of time that you are sick.

For more information, talk to your doctor or contact CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or <http://www.cdc.gov>.

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