

PREGNANT WOMEN, INFLUENZA AND INFLUENZA VACCINATION & FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should I consider the influenza vaccine if I am pregnant?

To protect myself and my unborn baby: Experience from previous seasonal influenza outbreaks including the 2009/2010 pandemic showed that pregnant women are at greater risk from complications associated with influenza. Maternal influenza infection has been associated with an increased risk of maternal hospitalisation and other illnesses. A small number of these women and babies die.

New Zealand and Australian data showed that in 2009 pregnant women were more than seven times as likely to be admitted to intensive care with influenza, when compared with non-pregnant women of child bearing age – rising to 13 times more likely if the woman was more than 20 weeks pregnant.

There are a range of changes that occur during pregnancy which may put pregnant women at higher risk of complications from influenza. These include changes to the lung function including decreased lung capacity; increased cardiac output and oxygen consumption, and changes to the immune response.

Because of the above changes, pregnant women with existing medical conditions are at even greater risk of severe influenza-related illness. When pregnancy is superimposed on high-risk conditions such as asthma or diabetes, influenza infection-associated illness is 3-4 times greater than for non-pregnant women.

How can I protect my newborn baby?

Newborns and young infants have higher rates of influenza and hospitalisation than other children but are too young to respond effectively to flu vaccination. Women vaccinated in pregnancy can offer protection to her newborn infant by passing antibody protection across the placenta which gives some protection to the infant for the first few months of life.

Why are pregnant women being offered free influenza vaccination?

Because of the higher risk of influenza infection to both mother and baby, health authorities in New Zealand, Australia, USA and many European countries also recommend that influenza vaccination be given to pregnant women. Vaccinating a pregnant woman offers protection both to the mother, the unborn baby and to the newborn baby.

Is the influenza vaccine a live vaccine?

No. The seasonal influenza vaccine does not contain live virus; it is completely inactivated and incapable of causing influenza infection.

How safe is it to have the influenza vaccine in the first trimester?

Inactivated influenza vaccine can be safely administered during any trimester of pregnancy. There is no increased risk of reactions to the vaccine for pregnant women or for your baby.

When can I have the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine can be given at any time during pregnancy, when influenza is circulating.



Can I have the influenza vaccine if I am planning to get pregnant?

Yes. The seasonal influenza vaccine is strongly recommended for women who will be pregnant during the influenza season. However, a charge may apply.



Can I have the influenza vaccine if I am on IVF treatment?

Yes.

If I have had miscarriages in the past and am now pregnant is it okay to have the influenza vaccine?

Yes. Inactivated influenza vaccines do not increase the risk of miscarriage. However Influenza infection does.

Is there thiomersal (mercury) preservative in the influenza vaccine?

No. The influenza vaccines used in New Zealand are preservative free.

Will the influenza vaccine harm my baby?

No. Research has shown that the vaccination of pregnant women reduces the risk of influenza not only in the mother but also in their newborn baby.

How many doses do I need?

You only require one dose of influenza vaccine, preferably at the beginning of the season however the funded vaccine is available through to 31 July. As the influenza viruses tend to change from year to year it is recommended that you have the influenza vaccine each season. The vaccines usually change each season to include the latest influenza strains.

I am pregnant and want the influenza vaccine but I have a cold, should I have it?

If you don't have a fever and are only experiencing a cold or runny nose or sniffles, it is okay to receive the vaccine. However, if you are very unwell, defer until you are better. If in doubt, check with your midwife or doctor.

I have just had my baby, can I have the influenza vaccine and will it protect my baby if I am breastfeeding?

Yes, it is safe for you to have the influenza vaccine. Breastfeeding may also offer some protection to your baby.

I am pregnant and work with children, should I have the influenza vaccine?

Yes. Influenza infection rates are generally highest in children and they are a major source of the spread of influenza viruses in the community. Influenza virus may be found in respiratory secretions (breathing, coughing and sneezing) for two weeks or longer in children.

I had the influenza vaccine last year, why do I need it this year?

In 2012 the influenza immunisation is providing protection against the same influenza viruses represented in the 2011 vaccine. Annual vaccination is still recommended because immunity lessens over time and those most at risk need maximum protection.

Maternal influenza vaccination targets two high-risk groups with one vaccine dose – pregnant mothers and newborn babies.

References: 1. Schlaudecker E, Steinhoff M. Helping Mothers Prevent Influenza Illness in Their Infants. *Pediatrics* 2010; 126; 1008-1011. 2. Tamma PD, Ault KA, del Rio C, Steinhoff MC, Halsey NA, Omer SB, Safety of influenza vaccination during pregnancy. *Am J Obstet Gynecol.* 2009; 201 (6);547-552. 3. *BMJ* 2010; 340:c1279. Critical illness due to 2009 A/H1N1 influenza in pregnant and postpartum women: population based cohort study. Blanchard-Rohner G, Siegrist C Vaccination during pregnancy to protect infants against influenza: Why and why not *Vaccine* 29(2011)7542-7550. The influenza vaccine is a prescription medicine. Talk to your midwife or doctor about benefits and possible risks or ring 0800 IMMUNE. TAPS NA 5597