

Protecting your baby against influenza starts when you're pregnant



INFLUENZA
in pregnancy and newborns

Ask about the free vaccine today.
health.gov.au/immunisation



A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Initiative

PROTECTING YOUR BABY AGAINST INFLUENZA STARTS WHEN YOU'RE PREGNANT

What is influenza?

Influenza is a highly contagious viral infection that spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications, including pneumonia, and heart and other organ damage.

Influenza is a serious disease for pregnant women and their babies

- Changes to your immune, heart and lung functions during pregnancy make you more vulnerable to severe illness from influenza.
- Even healthy women with an uncomplicated pregnancy can develop life-threatening influenza. Other complications can include premature labour or stillbirth.
- For young babies, influenza infection can cause pneumonia and can even lead to death.
- Babies under six months of age are more likely to be hospitalised with influenza than any other age group. These babies are too young to get the influenza vaccine themselves.

Influenza vaccination in pregnancy gives protection to your baby

- The best way to protect your newborn baby against influenza is to get vaccinated during pregnancy.
- By getting vaccinated, you pass on protective antibodies to your baby through the placenta which protects them in their first few months of life, when they are most vulnerable and too young to have the influenza vaccine themselves.
- Getting vaccinated against influenza during pregnancy also reduces your chances of experiencing stillbirth and other complications that can harm your developing baby.

Influenza vaccination is safe at any stage of pregnancy

- There is extensive evidence demonstrating the safety of the influenza vaccine in pregnant women. Studies of women vaccinated in pregnancy have found no evidence that the influenza vaccine harms their developing babies.
- Common side effects from the influenza vaccine can include mild pain, redness, or swelling where the vaccine is given which last less than a few days and disappear without treatment. These side effects are no more common in pregnant women than in non-pregnant women.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Is the influenza vaccine free for pregnant women?

Yes. The vaccine is free for pregnant women through the National Immunisation Program.

Q: When should pregnant women get vaccinated?

The influenza vaccine can safely be given at any stage during pregnancy. It is best given before the influenza season starts, however, it can be given at any time during the year and it will still provide some protection to the mother and baby when it is born.

Q: Do I need to be vaccinated again if I was vaccinated last winter?

Yes. Every year the influenza vaccine is changed to protect against the types of influenza that are expected to be most common that year.

Q: What other vaccinations are recommended during pregnancy?

The whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine is also free for pregnant women through the National Immunisation Program. It is safe and provides protection for pregnant women and their young babies.

Managing influenza

Influenza is not the same as the common cold. Although some of the symptoms are similar, some people can become seriously ill.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Usually sudden onset of:

- fever (high temperature)
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- fatigue (tiredness)

Influenza is an illness that usually lasts for 5–7 days or more.

What if I get influenza?

- cover your mouth when coughing/sneezing and wash your hands before touching your baby
- if breastfeeding, continue to do so but avoid coughing and sneezing near your baby
- manage your temperature and muscle aches with paracetamol

Your GP can advise you on treatment options.

What if someone in my family gets influenza?

- keep them away from the baby if possible
- make sure they cover their mouths when coughing/sneezing and wash their hands before touching the baby.

What if my baby gets symptoms that I am concerned could be influenza?

- if breastfeeding, continue to do so
- seek medical attention by a GP
- keep your baby away from other people, especially other babies, children, older people, pregnant women and people with medical conditions.

Where can I get more information?

Speak to your immunisation provider about getting vaccinated during pregnancy.

Get in touch with your state health department:

SA Health 1300 232 272

health.gov.au/immunisation

All information in this publication is correct as at March 2019.

Australian Government Department of Health
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