

Influenza (Flu) Vaccination during Pregnancy

Pregnant women are at a much greater risk for serious complications from the flu than those who are not pregnant (up to five times the risk). Being pregnant increases your risk for hospitalization, preterm birth, and even death if you get the flu. The flu shot has been proven to be very safe and effective during pregnancy. Not only can it protect you against the flu during and after pregnancy but it also protects your newborn baby up to 6 months after delivery. The vaccine is manufactured annually and is made available seasonally, typically in the fall and winter. It is best to receive the vaccine as soon as it is available before the flu season starts in order to ensure your body has adequate time to respond to the vaccine and protect you before you encounter the virus. **The vaccine does not give you the flu!** That is a myth that many use as an excuse to refuse the vaccine – the vaccine may not prevent you from getting colds or milder forms of the flu but it will protect you and your baby against these serious complications of the flu.

Previously it was recommended to give the vaccine after the first trimester of pregnancy but it has been clearly demonstrated that the vaccine is safe at **any time** during pregnancy. The vaccine may also be administered safely after delivery and does not interfere with breastfeeding. It is important to know that the nasal spray form of the vaccine is not safe to use during pregnancy whereas the shot is. Individuals with severe egg allergies should not be given the flu shot.

What to do if you get the flu during pregnancy:

If you think you might have the flu (fever, muscle aches, chills and feeling ill) use Tylenol (acetaminophen) to bring your fever down and call your provider. If you do have the flu you may be prescribed medications which may help reduce the severity of your illness. Seek immediate medical attention (call 911 or proceed to the emergency room) if you experience difficulties breathing or shortness of breath while at rest, confusion, blacking out episodes, severe or persistent vomiting, or a high fever that does not respond to Tylenol.

