

# Pregnant? Get a Flu Shot

## Should pregnant people be vaccinated against flu (influenza)?

Yes! It is especially important for you to get a flu shot if you are pregnant or are newly postpartum. Getting a flu shot will help protect you and your developing baby. It even protects your baby 6 months after birth, while they are too young to get their own flu vaccine.

Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant people than in people who are not pregnant. When you are pregnant, changes in your immune system, heart, and lungs make you more prone to severe illness from flu – as well as to hospitalization and even death. If you have chronic conditions, like asthma or diabetes, your risk of complications is even higher. Pregnant people who get sick with the flu may also have a greater chance for serious problems for their developing baby, including premature labor and delivery.

## When should you get the flu vaccine?

It is best to get the flu vaccine in September or October, before flu season starts. Pregnant people in their third trimester can consider getting vaccinated earlier, but you can get it anytime during flu season – and anytime during your pregnancy.

## Is flu vaccine safe?

Yes. The flu shot has been given to millions of pregnant people over many years. Flu shots have not been shown to cause harm to pregnant people or their babies. It is a safe way to help protect a parent and their developing baby from serious illness and complications of flu.

## What is flu?

Flu is a contagious respiratory disease. It is not the same as the "stomach flu." Flu is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death.

Getting a flu shot is the most important step in protecting pregnant people and their babies against the flu.

## What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. Not everyone with flu will have a fever or experience all of these symptoms. Symptoms usually begin suddenly and might be severe enough to stop your daily activities.

## How is the flu different from a cold?

Colds are generally less serious than the flu. With a cold you may have a runny or stuffy nose, while the flu causes body aches, fever, and extreme tiredness. A person with a cold can usually keep up with their normal activities, but someone with the flu cannot. Flu can cause serious health problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections, and hospitalization.

## What should you do if you are pregnant and get sick with flu?

If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, even if you have already had a flu shot, call your doctor or clinic right away. If needed, the doctor will prescribe an antiviral medicine that treats the flu. This can lessen symptoms and shorten the amount of time you are sick. Treatment is most

effective when it is started soon after symptoms begin.

**If you have any of these symptoms, call 911 right away:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or belly.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.
- High fever that doesn't get better with Tylenol (or store brand equivalent).
- Decreased or no movement of your baby.

## Can you get the flu from the flu shot?

No. Some people do get mild flu-like symptoms for a short time after being vaccinated, but this is a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine. It is not the flu. Also, because there are many cold viruses circulating in the fall, it is possible to be infected and become ill at the same time they receive the flu shot.

## What can you do to protect yourself?

- Get vaccinated.
- Ask anyone who will have close contact with you or your infant to be vaccinated.
- Stay at home from school or work if you have a respiratory infection.

- Avoid exposing yourself to others who are sick with a flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze, and then throw the tissue away.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough, or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often – with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- If you have an infant, don't expose them unnecessarily to large crowds when flu is in your community and avoid close contact between the baby and family members who may have the flu or other respiratory infections.
- Do not share anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (doorknob, refrigerator handle, phone, water faucets) if someone in the house has a cold or flu.

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