

# A Pregnant Woman's Guide To Preventing the Flu



## What is influenza (the flu)?

- The flu is an illness caused by flu viruses. It spreads when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes.
- Pregnant women can get very sick, be hospitalized, or even die from the flu.

## I am healthy. Should I be concerned?

- During a normal pregnancy, your body's natural defenses weaken and it is harder for your lungs to fill with air.
- Even healthy pregnant women and their babies are at risk for serious flu complications, like pneumonia.

## Is a flu shot the best way to prevent the flu?

- Yes! Flu shots trigger your body to naturally build immunity to flu viruses.
- This year, the flu shot will protect you from 3 types of flu viruses, including the H1N1 flu virus.
- You should still get a flu shot this year, even if you got vaccinated last year.
- You can get a flu shot at any stage of pregnancy.
- Pregnant women should get flu shots, not nasal-spray flu vaccine.

## Are flu shots safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies?

- Yes! Millions of people, including pregnant-women, have safely gotten flu shots for many years.
- The most common side effects are tenderness and redness where the shot was given.

## How else can I keep healthy?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Eat healthy and get plenty of rest.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay away from sick people.

## How can I protect my newborn?

- The flu can be dangerous for newborns. However, only babies at least 6 months are old enough for the flu vaccine.
- Get a flu shot during pregnancy. Some immunity you develop will pass on to your unborn baby. This will help protect your newborn.
- Anyone who will have close contact with your baby needs flu vaccine.
- If you do not get a flu shot during pregnancy, be sure to get flu vaccine after delivery.

Make an informed choice

**Talk with your doctor about the flu shot**

# Caring for Yourself If You Get Sick with the Flu



For many pregnant women the flu will be mild. For some it can get worse quickly and complications can be serious, even fatal.

## Symptoms of the flu, including H1N1 flu

People may have all of these symptoms or just some (such as, just a fever and a cough):

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

## What should I do if I think I have the flu?

- Call your doctor right away.
- During pregnancy, treat a fever quickly with acetaminophen (Tylenol®).
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Stay home and have someone check on you.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash.

## What about antiviral medicines?

- Antiviral drugs fight flu viruses in your body and help treat the flu.
- If you are sick, or have close contact with someone with the flu, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral.
- You can take an antiviral while you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

## Go to the emergency room if you have any of these symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or belly
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Vomiting that is severe or goes on and on
- Less or no movements of your baby
- A high fever that does not go down with Tylenol®

## How can I protect my newborn if I get sick?

- Breast milk may help your new baby fight many infections, like the flu.
- If you have flu-like symptoms, to help protect your baby:
  - Be careful not to cough or sneeze into your baby's face.
  - Wash your hands often.
  - Wear a face mask while you breastfeed or care for your baby.
- Ask an adult who is not sick to help you.

## Want to Learn More?

[pregnancyshotsca.org](http://pregnancyshotsca.org)

[flu.gov](http://flu.gov)

[marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com)

If you get sick  
**Call your doctor right away**