

Getting a flu shot during pregnancy

What is the flu?

The flu is an infection caused by a virus. People with the flu quickly become ill with a cough, fever, chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and tiredness. Most people are sick for 5 to 7 days, although the cough may last for weeks. In some people, the flu can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and death.

The flu spreads easily from infected persons to others through coughing and sneezing. It can also be picked up through direct contact with surfaces and objects, like unwashed hands and toys.

What is the flu shot?

The flu shot is a vaccine that helps protect against getting the flu (influenza). The shot is given in the muscle in the upper arm.

The vaccine works by causing your body to produce its own protection against the flu. The flu shot can prevent the flu in most people. It may lessen how ill you feel if you do get the flu.

Why is a flu shot important when I am pregnant?

The flu can cause serious health problems for pregnant women and babies:

- If you get the flu during pregnancy, you are more likely to have premature labour and birth.
- If you are pregnant or have just given birth and get the flu, you are more likely to develop complications like pneumonia or be admitted to hospital.
- Newborn babies are more likely to develop complications from the flu.

The flu shot protects you and your baby:

- After a flu shot, your body makes antibodies that will protect you from the flu. These antibodies pass to your unborn baby and will protect your baby from the flu for months after their birth. Breastfeeding also helps to pass these antibodies to your baby.
- It is important to protect your baby because **babies less than 6 months old cannot have the flu shot.**

How safe is the flu shot?

- **The flu shot is safe if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.** Flu shots have not been shown to cause harm to pregnant women or their babies. The small amount of preservative (thimerosal) in vaccines has not been shown to cause harm. A thimerosal-free flu shot is available if you wish to avoid thimerosal.
- Minor side effects from the vaccine include: pain and swelling where the shot is given, tiredness, muscle and joint pain, fever and headaches. Most side effects are mild, do not last long and usually go away on their own. Serious side effects and allergic reactions are very rare.
- You cannot get the flu from the vaccine.

Some caution is needed for women with certain health conditions.

Please see your doctor before getting a flu shot if you:



- have had an allergic reaction to any flu shot or vaccine have a bleeding disorder or you take medication that could affect blood clotting (blood thinners).
- have a serious infection that started recently (you should wait until you recover before getting a flu shot).
- have had Guillain-Barré Syndrome within 6 weeks of getting a flu shot.
- have had severe Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome (ORS) after getting a flu shot.

You can get a flu shot at your local pharmacy or at the hospital pharmacies. If you are a patient at the hospital, please ask your nurse.