

#FLUVAXJAX

Flu Vaccine Fact Sheet for the Obstetric Population*

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza (the flu) is a seasonal virus that infects millions of people each year. Unlike the common cold, it usually comes on suddenly and can lead to serious complications. You may have a fever, headache, fatigue, muscle aches, coughing, and/or sore throat. Some infections develop severe, possibly life-threatening symptoms such as pneumonia.

Pregnant women are at increased risk of developing flu complications and have the strongest recommendation to be vaccinated. Why?

Normal changes in the immune system that occur during pregnancy may increase your risk of flu complications. You also have a higher risk of pregnancy complications, such as preterm labor and preterm birth, if you get the flu. You are more likely to be hospitalized if you get the flu while you are pregnant than when you are not pregnant. Your risk of dying from the flu is increased as well.

Who should get vaccinated against the flu?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that everyone six months of age and older — including pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding — get the flu vaccine each year. You should get the vaccine as soon as it is available, usually in September or October. It is safe to receive the flu vaccine during any trimester of pregnancy.

Which type of flu vaccine should I get?

It is recommended that pregnant women get the flu shot which contains the inactivated virus. The nose spray, which contains a live, attenuated flu vaccine, is not recommended during pregnancy. Both are safe during breastfeeding, however.

How often should I get the flu vaccine?

Because the influenza virus can change slightly from one season to another, it is recommended to receive the vaccine yearly.

How does getting the flu vaccine when I am pregnant help my baby?

The flu vaccine, like the TDaP vaccine for pertussis (whooping cough), can cause your body to create antibodies that can protect you from the flu and other diseases. These antibodies can transfer to your baby before birth and provide some protection for the first six months of their life. Once reaching six months of age, the baby should receive the flu vaccine themselves.

Are vaccines safe?

Vaccines are developed with the highest safety standards. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves all vaccines. The CDC continues to monitor all vaccines after they are approved. They have been used for many years in millions of pregnant women and are not known to cause pregnancy problems or birth defects.

Can vaccines made with thimerosal cause autism?

There is no scientific evidence that vaccines made with thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative, can cause autism or other health problems in babies. Thimerosal-containing vaccines do not cause autism in children born to women who received these vaccines. There is a flu vaccine made without thimerosal, but experts have not said that the thimerosal-free version is better for any particular group — including children and pregnant women.

What should I do if I get the flu while I am pregnant?

If you think you have the flu while you are pregnant (or you have had a baby within the past two weeks), contact your obstetrician or other health care professional right away. Taking an antiviral medication as soon as possible is recommended. Flu symptoms may include the following:

- Fever or feeling feverish
- Chills
- Body aches
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Cough or sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose

Antiviral medication is available by prescription. It is most effective when taken within 48 hours of the onset of flu symptoms, but there still is some benefit to taking it up to 4–5 days after symptoms start. An antiviral drug does not cure the flu, but it can shorten how long it lasts as well as the severity of the illness. Even if you just think you have the flu, it is best to be on the safe side and contact your obstetrician or other member of your health care team.

What should I do if I come into close contact with someone who has the flu while I am pregnant?

You also should call your obstetrician or other health care professional if you are pregnant and come in close contact with someone who has the flu. This includes living with, caring for, or talking face-to-face with someone who may have the flu. You may be prescribed an antiviral drug to reduce the risk that you will get the flu.

**This document is modified from resources provided by The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists (ACOG). For the complete ACOG FAQ sheet, visit: <https://www.acog.org/patient-resources/faqs/pregnancy/the-flu-vaccine-and-pregnancy>*