Flu, Your Pregnancy and You
What you need to know and do to protect yourself and your baby

SUMMARY
Pregnant women are at increased risk of getting serious complications from flu, compared with other healthy adults.

Flu can also be serious for new-born babies, who can catch the infection from their mothers.

This leaflet describes how having the flu vaccination during pregnancy can help protect you and your baby against this infection.

What is flu?
Flu is a highly infectious disease. The symptoms, that come on very quickly, include fever, chills, headaches, aches and pains in the joints and muscles, and extreme tiredness. A bad bout of flu is worse than a heavy cold. You are likely to spend a few days in bed. Serious infections, although less common, can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability and even death.

What causes flu?
Flu is caused by viruses that are spread from person to person. They infect the respiratory system (wind pipe and lungs), where they can lead to pneumonia and other complications. The viruses can change every year which is why people have to be vaccinated annually.

How is flu spread?
When an infected person coughs or sneezes, they spread the flu virus in tiny droplets of saliva over a wide area. These droplets can then be breathed in by other people or they can be picked up by touching surfaces where the droplets have landed. You can prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and you can wash your hands frequently or use hand gels to reduce the risk of picking up the virus. But the best way to help avoid catching and spreading flu is by having the vaccination before the flu season starts.

How can I avoid catching flu?
Because people are infectious a day or so before the symptoms start to show (as well as up to seven days after), they won’t know if they are spreading the virus or not.

So it’s very hard to avoid contact with people infected with the flu virus. And, of course, members of your family can always bring it into the home.

You can wash your hands regularly but this won’t stop you catching the disease by breathing in the infected droplets in the air.

Other Headings in Leaflet
Why does being pregnant make it more serious for me?
How does my baby benefit?
I thought pregnant women shouldn’t have vaccinations?
Will I get any side effects?
When should I have the jab?
Are there any other vaccinations I should have during my pregnancy to protect my baby?
How many will I need?
I think I might have caught flu, what should I do?
I had flu before getting pregnant – aren’t I immune now?
Do I need to have it now that I am pregnant again?
Some children have it as a nasal spray. Can I have that instead of an injection?

For further information see:
www.nhs.uk/vaccinations

www.bhps.org.uk/item/flupr1516