Pregnant?
Are you flu safe?
Get the jab!

“Protect yourself and your baby with a free flu jab…”

Information for pregnant women

www.nhs.uk/flu
What is seasonal flu?
Seasonal flu is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. It occurs every year, usually in the winter. The flu is more than just a common cold; it can be a very serious illness that can cause harm to you and your baby.

You can get flu safe with a free jab, or ‘vaccination’, that helps protect pregnant women and their baby.

What harm can seasonal flu do?
People often think that flu is just a bad cold, but in reality flu is usually much worse: symptoms include fever, chills, headaches, aching muscles, a cough and sore throat. As flu is a virus, antibiotics won’t help treat it.

Women at any stage of their pregnancy are at greater risk of developing complications of seasonal flu. Getting the flu can result in a stay in hospital, and in severe cases can cause death.
Why should pregnant women get the flu vaccine?

It is recommended that all pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy, get the seasonal flu vaccine. This is because pregnant women are more prone to complications from flu, which can cause very serious illness for both the mother and her baby.

There are several reasons for this:

- During pregnancy, a woman’s natural immunity to infection is reduced in order to prevent the baby being rejected and so they may be more likely to get seriously ill if they get flu.

- As the womb increases in size, the lungs get squashed, so the woman may not be able to breathe as deeply as before. This increases the risk of infections, such as pneumonia, that can follow flu.

- The H1N1 virus (which was known as ‘swine flu’) is now one of the seasonal flu viruses. H1N1 seems to affect younger people in particular (older people already have some immunity to it), so pregnant women make up a bigger proportion of those with complications than is the case with other strains of flu.

For all these reasons, pregnant women should have the flu vaccination at any stage of their pregnancy. Importantly, having the vaccination when pregnant helps protect their baby from flu in the first few months of life.
When should pregnant women get the flu jab?

All pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy, are advised to get the flu vaccine during flu season. This is normally between October and January, and the vaccine is free from your GP practice. But you should aim to get the jab as early as possible during the flu season.

If you are pregnant, you should contact your GP to arrange an appointment.

I am pregnant, haven’t had the vaccination and think I may now have flu. What should I do?

You should talk to your doctor immediately, because if you do have flu, the antivirals he or she will prescribe for you need to be taken very soon after the first symptoms appear. As you won’t know which flu virus has caused your flu, you should then have the vaccination to protect you against the other flu viruses as soon as the illness has gone.

Talk to your GP or midwife if you are unsure.
“The jab can also protect your baby for the first few months of their life...”
Is the vaccine safe and effective in pregnancy?

**YES** – The vaccine has been given routinely to pregnant women in other European countries and in the USA for many years. Research on the safety and effectiveness of the flu vaccine in pregnancy has shown that it can be given at any stage of pregnancy and that there is no evidence of problems for pregnant women or their babies.

Studies show that seasonal flu vaccination during pregnancy will provide immunity against flu to babies for the first few months of their life.

How quickly does the flu vaccine work?

It normally takes between 10–14 days to develop protection after the vaccine. This means that there is still the chance of catching flu just after receiving the vaccine, so try to get it as early as possible to minimise the risk.

Washing your hands regularly also helps to reduce the chances of catching flu.
Can the vaccine give you flu?

NO – The jab doesn’t contain any live virus, so it cannot give you the flu. Occasionally, some people get ‘flu-like symptoms’ after having the jab – so you might get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards. This is a common reaction after any vaccine. Similarly, your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected, a relatively minor discomfort compared to having the flu itself. Any other reactions are rare - flu vaccines are very safe, trusted and well tested.

Do I need a flu vaccine if I have had one before?

YES – This year’s vaccine contains protection against three strains of the flu virus. Therefore the jab varies slightly each year to match the strains expected to cause most infections in the coming season. Even if you have had a jab before, you will probably not be protected against all three virus strains in this year’s vaccine and an additional dose will just boost any existing immunity.

“You’d do everything you can to protect your baby...”
Get the jab – Get flu safe

Flu can be serious if you are pregnant. It can knock you off your feet for weeks, and can put you and your baby at serious risk.

If you are pregnant, whatever stage you’re at, you should get the flu jab from your GP to protect you and your baby. It is quick, safe and free on the NHS.

This leaflet explains why the NHS recommends pregnant women get their free seasonal flu vaccine, and how the jab protects you and your baby against seasonal flu viruses, including the H1N1 virus.

Just speak to your midwife, GP, practice nurse or pharmacist for more advice, or go online at www.nhs.uk/flu.

Adapted from information in the Department of Health Green Book ‘Immunisation against Infectious diseases’. 2012.

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