



PREGNANCY AND FLU

Pregnant women can become quite sick with flu (influenza virus) and are at an increased risk of complications. During flu season it is best to take precautions to protect yourself and your unborn baby.

Flu symptoms

After you have been infected with the flu virus, you will usually start feeling the symptoms between one and three days later. Symptoms can include:

- fever
- chills
- cough
- sore throat
- headaches
- muscle aches
- severe tiredness
- loss of appetite.

Ways to avoid flu

Regular hand washing with soap and water, especially before meals. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as the flu virus can spread that way.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in a bin after you use it and clean your hands. Coughing or sneezing into your elbow reduces hand contamination.

If you have flu, avoid public places and close contact with others, especially children and pregnant women.

It is important that your family also take the same precautions.

Flu vaccination

Flu vaccination is recommended for pregnant women and anybody who has close contact with them. It is a free vaccine for pregnant women, children aged 6 months - 5 years and for people over 65 years.

The vaccine can be given at any stage of your pregnancy and will protect you from the common flu viruses. It is available from your local doctor (GP).

The flu virus changes frequently and so the vaccine has to be updated every year. Yearly flu vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your baby against flu. Flu vaccination during pregnancy is also highly effective in protecting babies against flu in the first six months of life.

The flu vaccine contains killed virus therefore you cannot catch the flu from the vaccine.

However, some people may experience the following side effects which are usually mild and can be controlled with paracetamol:

- pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- low grade temperature
- muscle aches
- drowsiness or fever
- allergic reaction (rare).

If you have flu-like symptoms

If you develop flu-like symptoms your GP can assess you to make sure that you and your baby are otherwise well.

If your GP suspects that you have the flu they may prescribe antiviral medications (such as Relenza or Tamiflu). These should be commenced in the first 2 days of the illness to have the greatest benefit.

GPs do not routinely test everyone with flu-like symptoms. However, because you are pregnant your doctor may decide to test you. This will involve collecting a nose and throat swab to look for the virus. Women who are near term (around 38 weeks pregnant or more) or those with pregnancy complications may need to be admitted to hospital.

If you are concerned about your own health or the health of your baby you should contact your GP or local hospital for advice or to make an appointment.

If I have flu-like symptoms should I attend my hospital appointments?

If you have cold or flu-like symptoms, it is recommended you go to your GP for a consultation before your pregnancy appointment.

If you have the flu or flu-like symptoms and you have an appointment at the Royal Women's Hospital, contact the hospital before you come. Unless there are medical reasons as to why you must come to the hospital, it may be more appropriate to make another appointment at a later date.

For general information from the hospital please call (03) 9345 2000.