

Why you should get immunised against the

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Influenza immunisation of pregnant women is recommended by the World Health Organization

Because of the higher risk of influenza infection to mother and baby, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that pregnant women should be the highest priority in seasonal influenza immunisation programmes.

Immunising a pregnant woman offers protection both to the mother, the unborn baby and to the newborn baby. And it is free for you.

Influenza immunisation could save you and your pregnancy

If you are pregnant it is important to protect yourself and your unborn baby from influenza.

Experience from previous influenza outbreaks shows that pregnant women, their unborn babies and their new infants are at greater risk from complications associated with influenza.

There are a range of changes that occur during pregnancy that put expectant mothers at greater risk, including changes to lung capacity, the immune system and heart rate response.

Pregnant women with existing medical conditions are at even greater risk of severe influenza-related illness.

Proven safety record for pregnant women

The influenza vaccine has been used for many years for pregnant women with no safety concerns and can be given during any trimester of pregnancy. There is no increased risk of reactions to the vaccine for pregnant women or their unborn babies.

Immunisation during pregnancy also protects babies after they are born

Newborns and young infants have higher rates of influenza and hospitalisation than other children but are too young to respond effectively to influenza immunisation. However, if you have been immunised in pregnancy you are likely to pass on some protection to your newborn baby (in part by passing antibodies across the placenta).

The protection from immunisation during pregnancy is also passed on to your baby so they are born with some protection against influenza for the first few months of life.

Studies have shown that babies born to mothers who received the influenza vaccine while pregnant are significantly less likely to be hospitalised with influenza than babies whose mothers did not receive the vaccine.*

The influenza vaccine will not harm your baby

The influenza vaccine does not cross the placenta into your baby. The vaccine simply stimulates your own immune system to make antibodies that can fight off the virus. Research has shown that the immunisation of pregnant women reduces the risk of influenza not only in the mother but also in their newborn baby.

Immunisation and breastfeeding

The influenza vaccine can be given to a breastfeeding woman. Protecting the mother can help prevent her becoming infected and transmitting influenza to her baby. Breastfeeding may offer some protection against influenza.

Maternal influenza immunisation protects two high-risk groups with one vaccine dose – pregnant mothers and their babies.



Pregnant women with influenza are nearly 5 times more likely to be admitted to hospital than women who are not pregnant.



Influenza.
Don't get it.
Don't give it.

Questions and answers

When is the best time to be immunised?

Influenza immunisation can be given at any time during pregnancy. It is preferable to be immunised as soon as the vaccine is available from 1 April, well before the start of winter. The vaccine is available through to 31 December.

Why is an influenza immunisation recommended every year?

Yearly immunisation is recommended for two reasons: first, because protection from the previous immunisation lessens over time; and second, because the circulating influenza viruses can change and the strains in the vaccine usually change each year in response to the changing virus pattern.

Women who are pregnant across two influenza seasons are recommended to have an influenza immunisation in both of the seasons. In addition to the reasons explained above, a pregnant woman's risk from influenza also increases as pregnancy progresses.

Can I have my free influenza and whooping cough booster immunisations at the same visit?

If you are in your second or third trimester, the influenza vaccine and whooping cough booster vaccine (Tdap) can be administered at the same visit. Both immunisations are free for pregnant women.

I am pregnant and want an influenza immunisation but I have a cold, should I still have it?

If you don't have a high fever and are only experiencing a cold, runny nose or sniffles, it's okay to receive the immunisation. However, if you are very unwell, wait until you are better. If in doubt, check with your Lead Maternity Carer, doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

I have a history of miscarriage. Is it OK to have an influenza immunisation?

Yes. Influenza immunisation does not increase the risk of miscarriage. However, catching influenza can increase the risk.

Is the influenza vaccine a live vaccine?

No. The influenza vaccine used in New Zealand does not contain any live viruses. The influenza viruses are completely inactivated and cannot cause influenza.

Are there any preservatives in the influenza vaccine, e.g. thiomersal?

No. The vaccine used in New Zealand is preservative free.

I am pregnant and work with children, should I have an influenza immunisation?

Yes. Influenza infection rates are generally highest in children, and they are a major source of the spread of influenza. The influenza virus may be found in respiratory secretions (breathing, coughing and sneezing) for two weeks or longer in children. Your risk of exposure to the influenza virus is higher and, as you are pregnant, so is your risk of influenza disease and serious complications.

It is also important for all people working with children, and especially young babies, to be immunised against influenza to reduce the risk of passing influenza onto them.

I have just had my baby, can I have an influenza immunisation? Will it protect my baby if I am breastfeeding?

It is safe for a breastfeeding woman to have the influenza immunisation. Breastfeeding may offer some initial protection to your baby. However, babies will have more protection if their mother is immunised during pregnancy.

* Benowitz I. et al, Influenza vaccine given to pregnant women reduces hospitalisation due to influenza in their infants, CID 2010;51, 1355-1361.

The influenza vaccine is a prescription medicine. Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about the benefits and possible risks. TAPS NA9775. IMAC2013.