

Frequently Asked Questions about the Flu Vaccination and Pregnancy

I am pregnant. Do I need a flu vaccination this year?

We encourage all pregnant women, at any stage of your pregnancy, to have the seasonal flu vaccine. This is because being pregnant you are more prone to complications from flu, which can cause very serious illness for you and your baby. There are several reasons for this

- During pregnancy, your natural immunity to infection is reduced in order to prevent your baby being rejected in the womb and so you may be more likely to get seriously ill if you catch flu.
- As the womb increases in size, your lungs get squashed so you 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 is one of the flu strains that is circulating this year 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, you should have the flu vaccination at any stage of your pregnancy. Importantly, having the vaccination when pregnant will help protect your baby from flu over the first few months of life.

Will the vaccine give me flu?

The vaccine does not contain any live viruses, so it cannot cause flu. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you had the injection. Other reactions are rare and flu jabs are very safe.

Will the vaccine harm my baby?

There is no evidence that inactivated vaccines, such as the seasonal flu vaccine, will cause any harm to pregnant women or their unborn baby. Every year, the seasonal flu vaccine is given to pregnant women who are at risk of flu.

I had the seasonal flu vaccination last year or in my last pregnancy. Do I need another flu jab this year?

Yes. The flu virus strains that circulate change over time. The flu vaccine helps protect against the three or four viruses most likely to be circulating this year so to get the best protection, you should have the vaccination now even if you have had a flu vaccination before.

When is the seasonal flu vaccination offered to pregnant women?

Flu vaccination is usually carried out between 1st of October and 31 January. It is not usual to carry on vaccinating after that date. However your GP can give you a flu vaccination up until March as the flu virus can continue circulating until then.

How do I access a seasonal flu clinic?

Seasonal flu clinics are held at all GP practices from the beginning of October. Please contact your registered practice to arrange an appointment.

How long will the vaccine protect my baby once it has been born?

Flu vaccination during pregnancy and after birth (if breastfeeding) provides passive immunity against flu to infants in the first few months of life.

I am pregnant, and think I may now have flu. What should I do?

You should talk to your doctor urgently, soon after the first symptoms (headache, cough, sore throat) appear. The flu vaccine does not give 100% protection against catching flu. So don't ignore the symptoms even if you have had the vaccine. If you have not yet had the flu vaccine you should then have the vaccination to protect you against the other flu viruses as soon as the illness has gone.

I am pregnant and not sure about the seasonal flu vaccination- where can I find out more information?

Further information is available from

- www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme.
- www.gov.uk/government/collections/immunisation-against-infectious-disease-the-green-book
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/flu-jab-vaccine-pregnant.aspx>

You can also discuss with your midwife or GP.