



## Pregnancy and Influenza: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

### **Are pregnant women more likely to get influenza (flu) than other people?**

Pregnant women have as much chance of catching the flu virus as anyone else. *However*, pregnant women are more likely to become severely ill than other people infected with the flu because of the changes their body goes through as a result of the pregnancy.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of the flu?**

The signs and symptoms of the flu include: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills, fatigue, and possibly diarrhea, vomiting, and a runny nose.

### **What can pregnant women do to avoid getting the flu?**

- Get the flu vaccine! This year the seasonal vaccine will contain the H1N1 and seasonal strains so only one shot is necessary for protection.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if soap and water are unavailable.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Minimize close contact with individuals with flu or flu like illness.

### **What should a pregnant woman with symptoms of the flu do?**

Pregnant women with flu symptoms should contact their doctor immediately, stay home (except to get medical care), and limit contact with others. Do not leave the home or return to work until you are feeling better and at least 24 hours after your fever has resolved.

### **How is flu treated?**

The flu can be treated with rest, plenty of fluids, and medicine. Antiviral drugs such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu<sup>®</sup>) or zanamivir (Relenza<sup>®</sup>) can be prescribed by your doctor and work best when taken 48 hours from the start of symptoms. Your doctor will decide which medication is best for you. Fevers should be reduced with medication like Tylenol or a store brand equivalent.

### **If someone close to me has the flu or may have the flu, what should I do?**

Tell your doctor about this. Your doctor will consider whether or not to prescribe you one of the antiviral medications to help prevent you from getting sick.

### **What flu vaccines should I get and where?**

The flu vaccine in the form of a shot is *safe* for pregnant women and their unborn child. The flu shot helps your body produce antibodies which protect against the flu. Protection from the 2009 H1N1 virus that circulated last year will be achieved by receiving a single seasonal flu shot. Persons with severe allergy to eggs or those who have had Guillain Barré Syndrome should not get the flu shot. Contact your doctor or the Philadelphia Department of Public Health to see when and where you can get the flu shot. The flu vaccine in the form of a nasal spray is not recommended for pregnant women.

### **How do I protect my newborn?**

- Wash your hands with soap and water before feeding your baby.
- Keep newborns away from others who are sick.
- Clean any item that an infant touches with their mouth, hands, or anything that may come into contact with bodily fluids such as toys or diaper changing mats.
- Infants six months of age and older can receive the flu shot.

**Can I breastfeed my baby if I'm sick?**

Breastfeeding helps protect babies from infections, like flu, so it is important to continue breastfeeding even if you are being treated for flu. If you have symptoms of the flu you should pump your milk into bottles and have someone who is not sick give your milk to your baby. If no one else is available to feed your baby you should wear a surgical mask and practice strict hand hygiene before each feeding. When caring for your baby, be careful not to cough or sneeze in your baby's face and remember to wash your hands with soap and water often.

**When to seek care?**

In general if you become ill and you are concerned about your health or the health of your baby you should consult with your medical provider. Early treatment is very important when you develop signs and symptoms of the flu. While you are pregnant if you exhibit any of the following symptoms you should call 911 right away:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever that is not responding to Tylenol (or a store brand equivalent)
- Decreased or no movement of your baby

**Where can I go for additional information?**

For more information contact your doctor or refer to one of the following websites:

- Philadelphia Department of Public Health:  
[www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl/FightingFlu.html](http://www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl/FightingFlu.html)
- Department of Health and Human Services:  
[www.flu.gov/individualfamily/parents/index.html](http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/parents/index.html)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm)