



October 19, 2009

H1N1 Influenza Vaccine and Pregnant Women

Why is it recommended that pregnant women get the H1N1 influenza vaccine?

A pregnant woman who gets any type of flu is at risk for serious complications. Pregnant women who are otherwise healthy have been severely impacted by the H1N1 flu virus. Compared to the general public, a larger proportion of pregnant women infected with the virus have been hospitalized. Severe illness and death have occurred in pregnant women. Outcomes among pregnant women that have been reported during the current H1N1 outbreak include: hospitalization, pneumonia requiring mechanical ventilation, death of the mother and preterm birth.

Can the H1N1 flu shot be given at any time during pregnancy?

Both the seasonal and H1N1 flu shots are recommended to pregnant women at any time during pregnancy.

Which kind of H1N1 flu vaccine should pregnant women get?

There are two types of flu vaccine: the shot and the nasal spray. Pregnant women should get the flu shot. The nasal spray flu vaccine (FluMist®) has not been approved for use in pregnant women. Close contacts of pregnant women, including family and household members, who are ages two through 49 years old and are healthy and not pregnant can get the nasal spray vaccine.

How many doses of the H1N1 flu vaccine will pregnant women need to get?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of one dose of the H1N1 flu vaccine for persons 10 years of age and older.

Is the H1N1 vaccine safe for pregnant women and does it contain preservatives?

Influenza vaccines have not been shown to cause harm to pregnant women or their babies. The seasonal flu shot has been given to millions of pregnant women and has been proven safe. The H1N1 flu vaccine is made using the same processes and facilities that are used to make seasonal flu vaccine. It is very important for pregnant women to get both the seasonal and the H1N1 flu shots.

There is no evidence that Thimerosal, a preservative used in multi-dose vials of vaccine, is harmful to pregnant women or their fetus. However, because some women are concerned about exposure to Thimerosal, manufacturers are producing preservative-free seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines in single dose syringes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends pregnant women get the flu vaccine either with or without Thimerosal.

What safety studies have been done on the H1N1 flu vaccine and pregnant women?

A number of clinical trials which test the H1N1 flu vaccine in healthy women and children, as well as pregnant women, have been conducted by the National Institutes of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

What are the possible side effects of the H1N1 flu vaccine?

The side effects of the H1N1 flu vaccine are expected to be similar to those from seasonal flu vaccines. The most common side effects following vaccinations are expected to be mild, such as soreness, redness, tenderness or swelling where the shot was given. Some people might experience headache, muscle aches, fever, nausea and fainting. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot was received and may last as long as one to two days. Like any medication, vaccines can cause serious problems including severe allergic reactions. However, these reactions are very rare.



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Can I get the flu from the flu vaccine?

No, the flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. The viruses contained in the flu shots are inactivated (killed), which means they cannot cause infection. Although the nasal spray flu vaccine is made with live, weakened flu viruses, they do not cause the flu either.

Can the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines be given at the same time?

The seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines may be administered on the same day but need to be given at different locations on the body (i.e., one shot in the left arm and the other shot in the right arm). The seasonal flu vaccine is currently available and pregnant women are encouraged to get it now and to get the H1N1 flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available.

Can a pregnant health care provider give the live nasal spray flu vaccine?

Yes. No special precautions are needed. Nurses and doctors should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub before and after giving the vaccine.

If a pregnant woman delivers her baby before getting her seasonal and H1N1 flu shot, should she still get them?

Yes. Aside from protecting a woman from infection, the shot may also help protect her young infant. Flu shots are only given to infants 6 months of age and older. Everyone who lives with or gives care to an infant less than six months of age should get both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines. A woman can get either the shot or the nasal spray after she delivers her baby.

Can a breastfeeding mother receive flu shots?

Yes. Both the seasonal and the H1N1 flu shots or nasal spray can be given to breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding is fully compatible with flu vaccinations, and preventing the flu in mothers can reduce the chances that the infant will get the flu. Also, through breastfeeding, a mother can pass on to the infant the antibodies that her body makes in response to the flu shots, which can reduce the infant's chances of getting sick with the flu. This is especially important for infants less than six months old, who have no other way of receiving vaccine antibodies, since they are too young to be vaccinated.

What should I do if I get sick with flu-like symptoms?

Pregnant women should watch for flu symptoms (primarily a fever with cough or sore throat). If you experience flu-like symptoms, stay home, stay away from others, and call your doctor right away. It is very important to treat a fever quickly with acetaminophen since pregnant women who get sick with H1N1 can have serious health problems. The earlier the symptoms are recognized, the better; the greatest benefits are expected if treatment is started within the first 48 hours of the onset of flu-like symptoms.

How can I get more information?

For more information on H1N1, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-5558 or email flu@sedgwick.gov.