

## Maternity information factsheet

# Seasonal flu vaccine in pregnancy

We have written this factsheet as a guide to having the seasonal influenza (or 'flu') vaccine while you are pregnant.

### What is flu?

Flu is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by an influenza virus. Most people catch flu when they breathe in the tiny airborne droplets (containing the virus) which come from the coughs or sneezes of someone who has the flu. You can also catch flu if you touch something with the virus on it, and then touch your mouth, nose, or eyes.

### What are the symptoms of flu?

Common symptoms of flu include:

- having chills or feeling feverish
- muscle or body aches
- a sore throat
- a runny or stuffy nose
- extreme tiredness
- a headache
- a cough

### Why do I need the flu vaccine?

Catching flu when you are pregnant can be very serious and can lead to complications for you and your baby. These complications can include:

- pneumonia (inflammation of the lungs)
- bronchitis (inflammation of the airways in the lungs)
- a worsening of pre-existing medical conditions
- needing to be admitted to hospital for treatment
- your baby being born with a low birth weight
- going into premature labour (labour that happens before the 37<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy)

In very serious cases, flu can cause miscarriage or stillbirth. It can also be fatal for both you and your newborn baby.

You should have a flu vaccine even if you are fit and well.

### Is the flu vaccine suitable for everyone?

If you are feeling unwell, we may advise you not to have your flu vaccine today. Please speak to your midwife if you are feeling feverish or have a high temperature. We will re-arrange your vaccination appointment for when you are feeling better.

You should speak to your midwife **before** having the vaccine if you:

- have a blood clotting disorder which can cause excessive bleeding after injections, or you are taking any blood thinning medication
- have already had this year's flu vaccine

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- are allergic to any of the following:
  - a previous flu vaccine
  - sodium chloride
  - potassium chloride
  - disodium phosphate dehydrate
  - water for injections
  - potassium dihydrogen phosphate
  - magnesium chloride hexahydrate
  - beta-propiolactone
  - cetyltrimethylammonium bromide
  - polysorbate 80

If any of these apply, you **may not** be able to have the flu vaccine. Your midwife will advise you if this is the case.

## Are there any side effects?

The flu vaccine is very safe and serious side effects are rare.

The most common side effects are mild discomfort, redness, or tenderness at the site of the injection. This should improve within 24 to 72 hours.

Less common side effects can include:

- mild fever
- headache
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- aching muscles

These side effects can be managed with paracetamol and will usually resolve within 24 to 48 hours.

## Frequently asked questions

### If I had the flu jab last year, do I need it again?

Yes, because there are several types of flu virus, and the virus changes its structure over time. This means the vaccine needs to continually change, so it targets the three or four flu viruses which are most likely to cause severe flu symptoms each year. The strains of virus included in this year's vaccine may be different from those included last year.

**The flu vaccine is the most effective way of protecting yourself and your baby from catching the most common flu strains of the year. The vaccine is safe for you to have at any point during your pregnancy. We strongly advise having it at the beginning of the flu season to ensure you're protected throughout the whole season.**

### Can I get flu from the vaccine?

No, it is not possible for the vaccine to give you flu because it is not a 'live' vaccine. It contains small fragments of the virus which have been deactivated or weakened. Your body will develop antibodies in response to these fragments, protecting you from future infection with the same flu viruses.

### How long does it take for the vaccine to work?

After you have been vaccinated, it will take around 14 days for the vaccine to take full effect. Please be aware that during this time, it is still possible for you to catch flu and other viruses.

### How effective is the vaccine?

On average the vaccine is around 60% effective, although everyone will respond differently. Even after having the vaccine, you may still catch flu, but if you do, the severity of your symptoms is likely to be reduced and you are more likely to feel better sooner.

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