

PREGNANCY, FLU AND FLU VACCINES

Pregnancy and the Flu (H1N1/Swine Flu or Seasonal)

- The H1N1 (Swine flu) virus and Seasonal Flu viruses can cause serious and even fatal disease in women who are pregnant.
- We know this because pregnant women get sick and die from Swine Flu and Seasonal Flu at rates higher than the general population. For example, pregnant women make up 1% of the US population, but 6% of the deaths from H1N1 flu.
- Pregnant women who develop fever and cough or sore throat should immediately contact their healthcare provider as soon as symptoms start. This is to evaluate the need for being seen by the doctor and to consider use of special medication for flu called antivirals. Early treatment of pregnant women with antivirals (within 1-2 days of flu symptom onset) can prevent complications and death.
- All healthcare providers should take flu like illness in a pregnant woman seriously and follow her closely. Clinical judgment is important and results of rapid tests for flu should not be the basis upon which treatment decisions are made. Similarly, providers who suspect influenza as the cause of illness should not wait for definitive lab test results to start treatment. (See <http://www.acog.org>)

Pregnancy and Flu Vaccines (H1N1 and the Seasonal Flu Vaccine)

- ❖ Seasonal flu vaccines have long been safely used by pregnant women.
- ❖ Now, there is also a way to prevent the H1N1 (Swine) Flu and protect both the health of the mother and the baby – the H1N1 vaccine.
- ❖ Here's the facts pregnant women and their health care providers need to know about H1N1 vaccine:
 - ✓ The H1N1 flu vaccine for pregnant women is the flu shot. (Nasal spray is not licensed for pregnant women).
 - ✓ There is nothing new about the H1N1 flu shot other than the virus it protects against. It comes in the same formulations as seasonal vaccine.
 - ✓ It's made just the same way and by the same manufacturers as seasonal flu shots are.
 - ✓ There were no shortcuts in manufacturing or quality control checks. In fact, H1N1 vaccine got more testing on safety and effectiveness than is done for seasonal flu vaccine.

- ✓ Vaccine experts believe the H1N1 flu shot should be just as safe as the seasonal flu shot. Clinical tests done to date support this as well.
- ✓ Taking the H1N1 flu shot during pregnancy provides two-for-one protection:
 - It helps protect the pregnant woman from H1N1 flu and its potentially serious consequences.
 - It helps protect the baby for up to six months after birth. The mother passes on the protection she develops to her new baby. This is important, because babies are at risk of flu but can't be vaccinated until they are at least 6 months old.
- ✓ There is little question about the risks and benefits of flu vaccine for pregnant women. It's a win-win situation for mother and baby.
- ✓ **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, doctors specializing in public health, and other major medical bodies recommend that all pregnant women, in any trimester, get vaccinated against both H1N1 and seasonal flu. Research this for yourself and learn more (<http://www.acog.org/> or <http://www.cdc.gov>).**
- ✓ Pregnant women should contact their local health department now to find out where and when they can get the H1N1 vaccine in their community. Most local health departments are starting to provide H1N1 vaccine to high risk groups, including pregnant women, starting in mid October.
- ❖ Other important information about flu vaccines and pregnant women:
 - ✓ Contacts of pregnant women (for example, their kids, other family members, and health care workers providing prenatal care) can take either the nasal spray or the flu shot, whichever is right for them.
 - ✓ Pregnant healthcare workers can administer the shot or the nasal spray flu vaccine to others. There is no special protective equipment or material needed to administer this vaccine just because you are pregnant.
 - ✓ Pregnant women need both a H1N1 flu shot and a seasonal flu shot, for they protect against different viruses.
 - ✓ If you still need both, the most important one to get now is the H1N1 shot, for H1N1 flu virus is the flu now circulating in our communities (mid October)
 - ✓ Pregnant women should also get a seasonal flu vaccine if available as well. Seasonal flu usually doesn't start circulating in West Virginia until December.
 - ✓ Pregnant women can get both H1N1 and seasonal flu shots at the same time (as long as given in different arms), or they can be given at any interval in any sequence.