

Influenza (Flu)

What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious disease with symptoms such as fever, chills, aches and pains, headaches and extreme tiredness. Pregnant women have a higher chance of developing serious complications of flu, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy, including pneumonia and even death.

Flu can also threaten your pregnancy, leading to premature birth, low birth weight and stillbirth.

Flu can also be extremely serious for newborn babies and young infants.

Why do I need the flu vaccine in pregnancy?

The flu vaccine reduces your chance of getting serious flu, needing hospitalisation or intensive care during your pregnancy. It also reduces the risk of pregnancy complications.

The vaccine boosts your antibodies against flu which are then passed to your unborn baby. This provides some protection to your new baby for the first few months of life.

You will also be less likely to catch flu and pass it on to your new baby over the winter.

When should I have the vaccine?

Flu vaccine is usually available from September each year and is free for pregnant women.

You should have the vaccine once it becomes available in September, whatever stage of pregnancy you are at. Ideally you should have your vaccine before the start of the flu season, but you can still have the vaccine at any time over the winter.

You will need a flu vaccine every time you are pregnant during the flu season.

Is the flu vaccine safe to have during pregnancy?

Since 2009 many countries have offered a flu vaccine in pregnancy, and over 2 million vaccines have been given to pregnant women in England. The vaccine has an excellent safety record.

Overall, it is much safer for you to have your vaccine than to risk you or your baby catching the flu infection.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

Having the flu vaccine in pregnancy halves the risk of you or your infant having a flu-like illness. Infants born to vaccinated women are around 70% less likely to be admitted to hospital with flu over the first 6 months of life.



Flu can be a serious disease for pregnant women and their babies.

Pregnant women should have a free flu vaccine during each pregnancy. It can be given at any stage of pregnancy starting from September.

What should I do now?

You can speak to your GP practice, midwife or health team to make an appointment to have your vaccines. The flu, whooping cough and RSV vaccines are all given as a single injection in the arm. Common side effects are mild and include:

- soreness and redness at the injection site
- headache and muscle aches
- mild fever or tiredness

You can read the flu leaflet here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-who-should-have-it-this-winter-and-why