

PREGNANT WOMEN AND INFLUENZA VACCINATION FAQs

Why should I consider the influenza vaccine if I am pregnant?

Experience from previous seasonal influenza outbreaks and in particular the 2009/2010 swine flu pandemic shows that pregnant women and their babies are at greater risk from complications associated with influenza. New Zealand and Australian data showed that in 2009 pregnant women were more than seven times as likely to be admitted to intensive care with influenza, when compared with non-pregnant women of child bearing age – rising to 13 times more likely if the woman was more than 20 weeks pregnant. A small number of these women and babies died.

Why are pregnant women now offered free influenza vaccination?

Because of the risk of influenza infection to both mother and baby, health authorities in New Zealand, Australia, USA and many European countries also recommend that influenza vaccination be given to pregnant women. Vaccinating a pregnant woman offers protection both to the mother and to the newborn baby.

Is the influenza vaccine a live vaccine?

No. The seasonal influenza vaccine is not a live virus; it is made from pieces of the virus and therefore is completely inactivated. It is incapable of causing influenza infection.

How safe is it to have the influenza vaccine in the first trimester?

Inactivated influenza vaccine can be safely and effectively administered during any trimester of pregnancy. There is no increased risk of reactions to the vaccine for pregnant women or to their baby.

Can I have the influenza vaccine if I am planning to get pregnant?

Yes. The seasonal influenza vaccine is strongly recommended for women who will be pregnant during the influenza season.

Can I have the influenza vaccine if I am on IVF treatment?

Yes.

If I have had miscarriages in the past and am now pregnant is it okay to have the influenza vaccine?

Yes. Inactivated influenza vaccines do not increase the risk of miscarriage. Influenza infection however does.

Is there thiomersal (mercury) in the influenza vaccine?

No. The influenza vaccines used in New Zealand are preservative free.



Does this year's seasonal influenza vaccine give protection against pandemic influenza?

Yes. The 2011 seasonal influenza vaccines contain an inactivated form of the Pandemic (H1N1) – swine flu strain.

Will the influenza vaccine harm my baby?

No. Research has shown that the vaccination of pregnant women reduces the risk of influenza not only in the mother but also in their newborn baby.

How many doses do I need?

You only require one dose of influenza vaccine, preferably at the beginning of the season however the funded vaccine is available through to 31 July. As the influenza viruses tend to change from year to year it is recommended that you have a dose of influenza vaccine each season. The vaccines usually change each season to include the latest influenza strains.

I am pregnant and want the influenza vaccine but I have a cold, should I have it?

If you have no fever and just the sniffles, it is okay to receive the vaccine. However, if you are very unwell, defer until you are better. If in doubt, check with your doctor or nurse.

I have just had my baby, can I have the influenza vaccine and will it protect my baby if I am breastfeeding?

Yes, you can have the influenza vaccine. Breastfeeding may also offer some protection to your baby.

I am pregnant and work with children, should I have the influenza vaccine?

Yes. Influenza infection rates are generally highest in children and they are a major source of the spread of influenza viruses in the community. Influenza virus may be found in respiratory secretions (breathing, coughing and sneezing) for two weeks or longer in children.

I had the influenza vaccine last year, why do I need it this year?

In 2011 influenza immunisation is providing protection against the same influenza viruses represented in the 2010 vaccine. Annual vaccination is still recommended because immunity lessens over time and those most at risk need maximum protection.

Maternal influenza vaccination targets two high-risk groups with one vaccine dose – pregnant mothers and newborn babies.