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Is it safe to have the flu jab when you're pregnant?

Not only is the flu vaccine safe for pregnant women, getting vaccinated is recommended. Yet half of pregnant women don't get their free NHS flu vaccination, despite it being a quick and effective service.

Pregnant women are bombarded with all kinds of health information, and it can be hard to keep up. By now it's likely that you've seen [flu vaccination](#) campaigns in GP practices, pharmacies and online. It's all too easy to ignore those public health campaigns when you're busy or preoccupied, but it could put you and your baby at risk.

Flu risk

Each year, thousands of people die from [flu](#). The risk of complications is higher among certain groups, including older people, people with certain long-term illnesses and pregnant women.

The NHS has a free flu vaccination programme to give these vulnerable groups the best protection possible throughout flu season. Yet many people aren't even aware that they're eligible. Across all under-65s who are eligible for a free vaccine, [uptake was at 49%](#) in 2017/18. Among pregnant women, the figure was slightly lower, at 47%.

"Pregnant women are often busy with their careers and perhaps other children and may not prioritise accessing the vaccine," says Virginia Beckett, Consultant Obstetrician and Spokesperson for the [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists](#).

"It's important to recognise that flu can be very serious, especially in pregnancy. It is not just a bad cold."

So why do you need the flu vaccine when you're pregnant? Flu affects pregnant women differently, explains Beckett. "The immune system is altered by pregnancy, so pregnant women are more at risk of developing flu and are more likely to develop serious complications from this viral infection."

Because of this, pregnant women are more likely to be hospitalised or die as a result of flu.

"Developing flu during pregnancy can be serious for women and their babies," she says. "A common complication is [bronchitis](#), a chest infection that can develop into [pneumonia](#) and [sepsis](#). Women can protect themselves and their babies by having the flu jab."

Safety

Understandably, pregnant women may be concerned that the flu vaccine isn't safe or might affect their pregnancy or [child's future health](#). But there's no truth in this, says Beckett.

"[Studies](#) have shown that the flu vaccination is safe for women to have at any stage in pregnancy, from the first few weeks, right up to the due date and while [breastfeeding](#)," she explains.

The flu jab is widely available, free and safe for pregnant women. Women who are trying to get pregnant during flu season don't qualify for a free vaccine - unless they become pregnant - but may be able to get a private vaccine cheaply from their pharmacist. Across the general population, getting vaccinated is a good idea to prevent you becoming ill, and prevent you passing on the flu to groups at risk of complications.

Even if you are coming to the end of your pregnancy, you should still get vaccinated to protect both yourself and your baby from flu.

"Each year a vaccine is developed to protect against the most common flu viruses for the coming flu season. This flu jab is available from September to January or February each year and women should have it as soon as possible in pregnancy," says Beckett.

"This means that some women will need to wait until quite late in their pregnancy for a vaccine, but flu is uncommon in the spring and summer. The vaccination when given in pregnancy also passes some protection to babies, which lasts for the first months of their lives."

Flu-like symptoms

If you do start to experience flu-like symptoms in pregnancy, it's a good idea to seek help, says Beckett. "If pregnant women are experiencing symptoms such as a [fever](#), chills, achy joints and muscles, [headaches](#) or chest tightness, it is advisable for them to contact their healthcare professional for further advice.

"Unless there are serious complications such as pneumonia, most cases of flu can be treated at home by taking paracetamol (unless previously instructed otherwise), drinking plenty of fluids and getting lots of rest and sleep."

But where possible, prevention is always better than a cure, especially when it comes to protecting you and your baby.

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