

Influenza vaccination Information for pregnant women

Pregnant women are at an increased risk of serious illness from the flu (influenza). That is why it is important to get vaccinated against the flu after week 16 of pregnancy. Vaccination does not affect the pregnancy or foetal development.

Flu is more dangerous for pregnant women

Most women who get the flu during pregnancy develop a relatively mild illness, but the risk of becoming seriously ill or dying is greater for pregnant women than for other, otherwise healthy people.

Pregnant women should get vaccinated

The Public Health Agency of Sweden recommends pregnant women to get vaccinated against the flu during the beginning of the influenza season, November–January. Vaccination is recommended after week 16 of pregnancy because the risk of severe flu is greatest during the later stages of pregnancy.

If you have any other medical risk factors for severe flu, we recommend that you get vaccinated even earlier in your pregnancy. Such risk factors include chronic heart disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes or extreme obesity. The vaccine is safe to use throughout pregnancy.

Vaccination does not affect the foetus

The foetus is not affected by flu vaccination. Several scientific studies show that there is no difference in foetal development between pregnant women who have been vaccinated and those who have not been vaccinated.

Vaccination also protects the newborn

If you get vaccinated, your child will also have some protection against the flu during the first months of life. This is because your antibodies are transferred to the foetus during pregnancy. Vaccination also reduces the risk that you get infected and transmit the flu to your newborn.

Side effects are mild

The flu vaccine may cause side effects, but the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks. The most common side effects are mild and pass quickly (see next column).

You cannot get the flu from the vaccine. There is no link between the seasonal flu vaccine and narcolepsy.

COMMON SIDE EFFECTS (at least 1 out of 100 vaccinated): swelling, pain and redness at the injection site, fever, chills, headache, sweating, muscle or joint pain.

UNCOMMON OR RARE SIDE EFFECTS: allergic reactions, itching, rashes or nerve pain.

Who should not be vaccinated?

Small amounts of egg protein may be present in the vaccine, since most flu vaccines use virus grown in chicken eggs. Contact your doctor if you have a severe egg allergy. Also, let your doctor know if you are allergic to anything in the vaccine or have reacted to previous vaccinations.

The vaccine is only effective for one season

The flu vaccine is effective for 6 to 9 months, which is enough for one flu season. The vaccine protects against three types of flu. These types change over time and sometimes new viruses emerge. That is why the vaccine is renewed for each flu season.

Seek medical care if you get the flu

It is important to know that pregnant women can become seriously ill from the flu, especially in the later stages of pregnancy. If you suspect that you have the flu, you should immediately seek medical care, even if you are not severely ill, regardless of which week of pregnancy you are in. You may need antiviral medication, for example, which works best if given as soon as possible after the start of symptoms.

For more information

For English language product information about the flu vaccine, search the European Medical Agency website for “influenza” or the specific vaccine name: <http://www.ema.europa.eu/ema/>

Information (in Swedish) about flu vaccination at 1177 Vårdguiden: www.1177.se/Fakta-och-rad/Behandlingar/Vaccination-mot-influensa/