

Influenza Immunization: Information if You are Pregnant, Breastfeeding, or have a Newborn

What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs (respiratory tract) that is caused by a virus. Influenza can happen any time during the year, but most cases happen in the winter months.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread through the air. The virus gets in the air when someone with the disease coughs, sneezes, or even talks. People who breathe in the virus can get sick. It can also be spread by touching objects that have been coughed or sneezed on by someone with the virus.

How serious is influenza?

Most people who get sick with influenza get better. However, influenza causes about 12,200 people to be admitted to the hospital and about 3,500 deaths in Canada each year.

There is a higher risk of getting complications from influenza for children 6 to 59 months of age, pregnant women, people 65 years or older, and people with chronic health problems.

Complications of influenza can include pneumonia, ear and sinus infections, and dehydration. Influenza can also make chronic medical problems (e.g., congestive heart failure, asthma, diabetes) worse.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

The symptoms of influenza are fever of 38.5 °C (101.3 °F) or higher that starts suddenly, cough, headache, muscle aches, loss of appetite, and feeling tired.

How can influenza be prevented?

- **Get the influenza vaccine.** Influenza vaccine is a very effective way to protect people from getting sick with influenza. You need to get immunized every year because the influenza viruses change.
- A new vaccine is made each year to protect against the viruses most likely to cause illness in that year. The best time to be immunized is in October or November, but you can get immunized any time during influenza season.
- **Wash your hands** with soap and water or clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that has alcohol in it.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with your arm or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Stay home** and rest when you are sick.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

All Albertans 6 months and older should get the influenza vaccine. It's **very** important for pregnant women, who are at a higher risk for complications from influenza.

It's also important to immunize anyone who may spread influenza to people at high risk for influenza-related complications (e.g., babies younger than 6 months who are too young to be immunized).

I am pregnant. Should I get immunized against influenza?

Yes. Because you are pregnant, you have a higher risk for serious complications from influenza and you should get immunized. You can get immunized any time during your pregnancy.

If you get influenza disease while you are pregnant, there is a higher risk of being admitted to the hospital and risk to the health of your baby (e.g., premature birth).

Immunization with the influenza vaccine will protect you and your baby while you are pregnant. The protection that you get while pregnant may transfer across the placenta and stay with your baby for a short time after birth.

Babies born to women immunized against influenza are less likely to be premature, small for gestational age, or have a low birth weight.

How else can I protect myself and my baby?

To further protect you and your baby, make sure everyone around you is immunized against influenza, especially people you live with.

Is the influenza vaccine safe to get while I am pregnant?

Yes. Research shows no evidence of harm to pregnant women or their babies when immunized with the influenza vaccine.

The injectable vaccine is inactivated, which means the virus in the vaccine has been killed and can't cause influenza disease in the person immunized. This is the vaccine recommended for pregnant women.

The live nasal spray influenza vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. If a family member or someone who has contact with you and your baby often gets the live nasal spray vaccine, there is no risk to you or your baby.

I am breastfeeding. Should I get immunized against influenza?

Yes. As a new mom, you are likely very busy taking care of your baby. It's important that you also take care of yourself by getting immunized for influenza. There is no risk to getting the influenza vaccine while you are breastfeeding.

Both the injectable and the live nasal spray influenza vaccines are safe to get while breastfeeding.

I have a baby younger than 6 months. How can I protect him or her from influenza?

Children younger than 6 months can't be immunized with the influenza vaccine. Protect your baby by encouraging everyone who has contact with him or her to get immunized.

People who have influenza disease may not have symptoms while they are infectious. It's not enough to stay away while they are sick. Encourage them to get immunized.

For 24/7 nurse advice and health information, call **Health Link Alberta** toll-free at 1-866-408-5465.

This content may be updated without notice.

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