



H1N1 and Flu Shots During Pregnancy

The H1N1 flu and seasonal vaccines are safe and recommended for pregnant women.

Be sure to:

- Get the H1N1 flu vaccine for yourself and your children (ages 6 months to 18 years)
- Get a seasonal flu vaccine for yourself and your family
- Get both an H1N1 and seasonal flu shot as soon as possible, both can be given at *any* time during your pregnancy
- Stay home from work or school if you or your family members feel sick
- Look out for flu symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue
- Contact your health care professional if you have flu-like symptoms
- Stop the flu from spreading by:
 - Covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze
 - Washing your hands frequently with soap and water
 - Keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose, or mouth
 - Cleaning surfaces (bedside tables, bathroom, kitchen counters, and children's toys) with a household disinfectant

Frequently Asked Questions

About the vaccine

Q: Why should pregnant women get the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine?

A: Flu can be serious for anyone who is pregnant. When you are pregnant, changes to your immune system can make you more sensitive to the flu. Getting the flu when you are pregnant can increase your risk of complications and hospitalization. Getting vaccinated can protect your unborn child from infection as well.

Pregnant women are at particular risk for the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (also called swine flu). In comparison to the general population, a greater proportion of pregnant women infected with the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus have been hospitalized, and a greater percentage have died.

While hand washing, staying away from ill people, and other steps can help protect pregnant women from infection, vaccination is the single best way to protect against the flu. If you are pregnant or have an infant younger than six months old, you should get vaccinated against H1N1 as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

Q: Is the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine safe for pregnant women?

A: In general, studies of flu vaccines show that the vaccines do not harm pregnant women or their fetuses. The seasonal flu shot (injection) is safe and recommended for pregnant women. The nasal spray vaccine is not recommended. The H1N1 vaccine will be made the same way, with the same precautions, as the seasonal influenza vaccines.

The National Institutes of Allergies and Infectious Diseases are testing the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine for use by pregnant women, other adults, and children.

Q: Won't a seasonal flu shot protect me from H1N1? Why do I need 2 vaccines?

A: You need two shots to protect against both types of flu. The seasonal flu shot will not protect you against H1N1. The H1N1 vaccine will not protect you from seasonal flu.

Q. Can I get both shots at the same time?

A: Yes, if both vaccines are available, you can get both shots on the same day. You will probably get one shot in each arm. The seasonal flu vaccine is already available. We expect the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine to be available in October. You should not wait until the H1N1 flu vaccine is available to get your seasonal flu vaccine.

Q: If I've had the flu in the last 6 months, do I still need the vaccine?

A: There is no way to know what sort of flu you had in the past. In fact, you may not have had the flu at all; many different infections cause the same symptoms as the flu (cough, sore throat, and fever). Even if you did have the flu, infection by one strain of influenza virus won't protect against other strains. Unless you were tested and know that you had H1N1 flu, you should get the vaccine.

Q: Does the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine have preservatives in it?

A: Yes, current supplies of the vaccine contain the preservative thimerosal. There is no evidence that this preservative is harmful to a pregnant woman or a fetus, or that it causes autism. Preservative-free vaccines may be available in the future. Given the high risk to pregnant women who get H1N1, Governor Schwarzenegger waived the California state requirement to use only thimerosal-free vaccine in pregnant women and children. This means that you and your young children can get an H1N1 vaccine immediately, which we strongly recommend.

Q: What are the possible side effects of the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine?

A. We expect the same side effects as those from seasonal flu vaccines. The most common side effects should be mild: soreness, redness, tenderness, or swelling where the shot was given. Some people might have a headache, muscle aches, fever, nausea, or fainting. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and may last as long as 1 to 2 days. Like other medications, vaccines can cause severe allergic reactions in some people. However, life-threatening allergic reactions to vaccines are very rare.

If you have a severe allergy to eggs or to any other substance in the vaccine, you should not get the vaccine. Be sure to tell the person giving the vaccine if you have any severe allergies, if you've had a severe allergic reaction after a flu shot, or if you have ever had Guillan-Barre Syndrome (a rare illness that causes paralysis).

Q: Is it true that the H1N1 vaccine requires two shots?

A. No. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of a one-dose vaccine against 2009 H1N1 flu for people 10 years of age and older.

Q: Where can I get seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines?

A: Both seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines are available from your health care provider, in vaccination clinics organized by local health departments, at schools, and in other settings, such as pharmacies and workplaces.

About H1N1 influenza**Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

A: The symptoms of the H1N1 virus are similar to those of seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting.

If you are sick or think you have the H1N1 virus, please contact your health care professional.

Q: How does H1N1 spread?

A: The H1N1 flu primarily spreads through contact with someone who has the flu. It moves from person to person the same way as seasonal flu, usually when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes. Typically, you can spread the flu as long as you have symptoms, and possibly up to seven days after the illness starts.

Q: How can I stop the flu from spreading?

A: The best way to stop the flu from spreading is to get vaccinated. In addition, you should:

- Stay home if you get sick
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Wipe surfaces (bedside tables, bathroom, kitchen counters, and children's toys) with a household disinfectant

Q: What should I do if I think I have the flu?

A: If you have flu-like symptoms, contact your health care professional. She will know how to treat your symptoms without harming your baby. There is medication to treat flu symptoms. The medication needs to be started within 48 hours of your first symptoms. If you have flu-like symptoms, please call immediately, since you may be eligible for treatment.

If you are sick:

- Stay home (except to get medical care) and limit contact with others

- Treat a fever with acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Drink plenty of fluids

If you aren't sick, but have close contact with someone who has H1N1 flu or is being treated for exposure to H1N1 flu, call as soon as possible. You may be eligible for medication that can help prevent you from getting the flu.

Q: What should I do in an emergency?

A: The flu may progress quickly in pregnant women, and may be complicated by bacterial infections, such as pneumonia. If you have any of the following signs, go to the Emergency Department or call 911 right away:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Turning blue
- Bloody or colored sputum
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Decreased or no movement of your baby
- High fever that hasn't come down with acetaminophen

About the flu and babies

Q: Is it safe to breastfeed if I have the flu?

A: Yes, breastfeeding is safe and good for your baby. You cannot give the flu to your baby through your breast milk.

Breastfeeding and breast milk protect your baby's health in many ways. Babies who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than babies who are breastfed. Mothers pass on antibodies—a type of protein made by your immune system that fight off infection—in their breast milk.

If possible, only adults who are not sick should care for infants, including feeding them. Remember to wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before feeding or handling your baby. And be sure not to cough or sneeze in your baby's face.

If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump and have someone else give your milk to your baby.

Q: How can I protect my other children from getting the flu?

A: Children older than six months should be vaccinated against H1N1. Infants younger than six months old can't be vaccinated. If you live with or care for a very young infant, you should get both a seasonal flu vaccine and a 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine to protect the infant. If you are concerned about the preservative used in vaccines, preservative-free seasonal vaccines are available.

We know that immunizing parents, especially mothers, is good for both mothers and infants. We also recommend that all family members who may be caring for a newborn or be near you in the pregnancy get vaccinated too.

In addition, you and your baby's caregivers should:

- Wash with soap and water any items that have been in your baby's mouth
- Avoid sharing toys and other items that have been in your baby's mouth
- Keep your infant out of crowded areas and away from people who are sick

Additional Resources:

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org/flu**
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at **flu.gov**
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at **cdc.gov** or 1-800-232-4636

Adapted from U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.