



# H1N1 Flu: What to Expect During Prenatal Care and Delivery

## **Pregnant women are at particular risk for the H1N1 flu. They can:**

- Get sicker than other people
- Get pneumonia
- Go into early labor
- Have life-threatening complications

## **If you have these flu symptoms, call your health care professional right away:**

- Fever, cough, sore throat, or a runny nose
- Body aches or headaches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Some people have diarrhea and vomiting

## **If you have these emergency warning signs, go to the Emergency Department or call 911:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- A high fever that doesn't respond to Tylenol
- Decreased or no movement from your fetus

## **Preventing the spread of H1N1**

### **Protecting you and others during prenatal visits**

If you have been exposed to someone who has H1N1 flu, call your doctor right away. Do not wait for your next appointment.

While it is very important for you to keep your prenatal visits, it also is important that you stay home if you are sick or have flu-like symptoms (see above). Minimizing the opportunities for the H1N1 flu to spread is the best way to keep you, your baby and other family members, and others in the community healthy.

If you are sick or have flu-like symptoms when you come in:

- You will be placed in a private room or in an exam room to wait for the doctor.
- Staff will wear masks and gloves during your visit.
- You may be tested for the flu using a simple nasal swab test, especially if you are ill enough to need to stay in the hospital for care.

### **Being treated for flu during your pregnancy**

We know that pregnant women run the risk of having severe flu or complications that can endanger you and your fetus. If you have the flu, flu-like symptoms, or have been exposed to H1N1, your doctor may recommend antiviral medication. Antiviral medications are approved for use by women any time during their pregnancy.

To be most effective, antiviral treatment should start within 48 hours of your first symptoms or of being exposed to someone with the flu. Be sure to tell your health care professional if you have been exposed to someone with a confirmed or suspected case of H1N1 flu.

Antiviral medications can help shorten the length of time you are ill with flu. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid, or an inhaled powder) that prevent flu viruses from reproducing in your body. The most common antiviral medications are oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza). They:

- Can make your flu milder and make you feel better faster
- May prevent serious flu complications

If your doctor prescribes antiviral medications, be sure to take them for all five days of the treatment.

### **Handling H1N1 flu during labor and delivery**

Like you, we want the birth of your baby to be a joyful occasion. We also want it to be a healthy one. We will take precautions during your labor and delivery if you have H1N1 flu or if you have been exposed to it.

The risk of transmission is greatest during the day before flu symptoms appear and up to seven days after you first have symptoms. If you go into labor during this period, to protect you, your newborn, and others in the delivery room:

- You will be placed in a private isolation room to minimize the risk of transmitting H1N1 to others.
- Your doctor will start you on an antiviral medication, if you are not taking it already.
- Friends, family, and other visitors will be asked to wear masks. Please limit the number of visitors to minimize their risk.
- You will wear a surgical mask during labor and delivery.
- You will be kept in a private room after the birth and your newborn will be taken to the nursery immediately.

While you are being treated for the flu, your newborn will be placed in isolation in the nursery. Your contact with your baby will be limited until:

- You have taken antiviral medications for 48 hours
- Your fever has come down
- You can control coughs, sneezes, and other infectious symptoms

While you are separated, your baby will be cared for in the nursery. Your baby will be monitored closely. If your baby develops flu-like symptoms, we will test him for H1N1 and provide appropriate treatment.

We will encourage and help you express your milk, which will be fed to your baby. The flu is not transmitted through breast milk. Breast milk protects babies by passing on antibodies that fight off infection.

As soon as you are well enough, you will be able to spend time with your newborn, and even breastfeed, as long as you:

- Wear a face mask and a clean gown or clothing
- Follow strict hand hygiene and cough etiquette

You should continue these precautions, in the hospital and at home, for at least seven days after your flu symptoms started.

If your flu symptoms last longer than seven days, discuss the symptoms with your doctor. You may need to continue the protective measures until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours.

### **Taking care of the newborns of mothers with H1N1**

Your newborn will be monitored closely for signs of flu after birth, especially if you went into labor when the flu is most contagious.

If your baby is well, family and friends who are not sick may visit, if they:

- Wear a face mask and a clean gown or clothing
- Follow strict hand hygiene and cough etiquette

Any family or friends who are sick should be asked to delay visiting you or your newborn until they are feeling well.

### **Protecting your baby when you are both home from the hospital**

You should continue breastfeeding when you get home. 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 fights 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.

If you have other children older than six months, make sure they get vaccinated against both H1N1 and seasonal flu. If you are concerned about the preservative (thimerosal) used in vaccines, a preservative-free seasonal flu vaccine is available.

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

- Get vaccinated against H1N1 and seasonal flu
- Be careful not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before handling your baby
- 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
- Contact your health care provider if any of you has flu-like symptoms

Stop the flu from spreading by:

- Covering your mouth with your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- 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

### **Additional Resources:**

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org/flu](http://kp.org/flu)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at [flu.gov](http://flu.gov)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [cdc.gov](http://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.