

Medical groups urge flu shots for pregnant women

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(AP) -- Flu season may not sound as scary for pregnant women this year as last - but they're still at high risk and need that shot, says a letter being mailed to thousands of health providers this week from some leading medical societies.

Any kind of [flu](#) is risky during pregnancy, for mother and baby. But last year's swine flu pandemic brought extra attention to the need for vaccination: Government data shows pregnant women account for only 1 percent of the population but represented 5 percent of swine flu deaths.

This year brings a return to the usual one-dose flu vaccine, which will protect against a return of that [swine flu](#) strain as well as two other flu types.

Women often are reluctant to take medications during their pregnancies and many obstetricians don't offer [flu vaccine](#) in their own offices, preferring that their patients get it elsewhere.

Explain the importance of vaccination to pregnant woman and help them find a shot, says Wednesday's letter to physicians and other health providers from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Medical Association, [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and eight other medical groups.

The only caveat is the type of vaccine: An influenza shot - the kind made with killed virus - is safe during any trimester of pregnancy, the letter

stresses. Pregnant women aren't supposed to receive the nasal spray vaccine FluMist, made with a live but weakened virus.

New moms, even if they're breastfeeding, can choose either vaccine, the letter says.

And an extra benefit: Vaccinated "[pregnant women](#) pass on their immunity, protecting babies until they are old enough to receive their own vaccinations," said Dr. Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes, who co-signed the letter.

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