

Flu shot a must for moms-to-be

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Getting the flu early in pregnancy doubles risk of birth defects, according to March of Dimes.

(HealthDay)—Catching the flu early in pregnancy doubles the risk of having a baby with a serious birth defect, which is why getting a flu shot is so important for women who are expecting, the March of Dimes warns.

But despite the protection offered by [flu vaccination](#), only half of all pregnant women in the United States get a [flu shot](#) every year.

"The annual flu shot should be a priority in prenatal care," Dr. Edward McCabe, chief medical officer at the March of Dimes, said in a news release from the organization. "Health care providers should offer all their pregnant patients a flu shot each year and if they don't offer it, then women should ask for it."

Now is the time for pregnant women to make an appointment for a flu

shot to ensure they get vaccinated early in the [flu season](#), McCabe said.

Pregnant women should receive the flu shot and not the [nasal spray vaccine](#), which is made with the live flu virus, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

The March of Dimes said along with getting a flu shot, pregnant women can reduce their risk of flu by limiting contact with others who have the flu; not touching their eyes, nose and mouth; washing hands with soap and water; using hand sanitizers; using hot, soapy water or a dishwasher to wash dishes and utensils; and never sharing dishes, glasses, utensils or toothbrushes.

It's also important for people who live with [pregnant women](#), or are in close contact with them, to get flu shots.

Pregnant women who develop [flu symptoms](#) such as fever, muscle aches and cough should see their health provider as soon as possible to begin antiviral treatment, according to the March of Dimes.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [pregnancy and flu shots](#).

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