

Pregnant women and those with chronic diseases should get a flu shot now

December 12 2019, by Matthew Oates



Libby Richards, associate professor of nursing at Purdue University. Credit: Purdue University photo

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting a continued increase in influenza activity for the week ending Nov. 30,

there is still time to get a flu shot. The vaccine is especially important for at-risk populations, says a Purdue University public health expert.

The [flu shot](#) is safe for at-risk populations such as [pregnant women](#), people with [chronic diseases](#) such as diabetes and asthma, and people undergoing cancer treatments, says Libby Richards, an associate professor of nursing who specializes in public health in Purdue's School of Nursing.

"Because every patient is different, it is important to talk with your health care provider about which vaccination is right for you," Richards says. "People with [chronic conditions](#) have weakened immune systems, so the [flu vaccine](#) may not work as well as it does in generally healthy populations but it is still important to get a flu shot. It is also important to think about other ways to protect yourself from the flu and other illnesses as well."

Richards says if you can't get the flu shot, you should stay away from people who are ill and avoid crowded areas. Frequently wash your hands and disinfect surfaces, and don't touch your eyes, mouth and nose. If you are immunocompromised, it is important to wear a mask and to have gloves as an option—and encourage your family members and visitors to get their flu shots.

Getting a flu shot while pregnant will help protect the baby after delivery. For pregnant women who will be delivering their baby during flu season, moms-to-be should talk over delivery and visiting plans with family and friends. "You can restrict visitors who have not received the flu shot and allow visitors only if they feel 100% healthy," she says.

Some hospitals and health care facilities will enact visitor restrictions if flu or other illnesses are widespread in a community.

"Visitors can be a great source of social support for hospitalized patients as long as the patient feels up to a visit and the visitor is well," Richards says. "Anyone who does not feel healthy should avoid visiting hospital patients or nursing home residents. Check with those facilities before you visit to see what their visitation policy is during flu season."

Provided by Purdue University

Citation: Pregnant women and those with chronic diseases should get a flu shot now (2019, December 12) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-12-pregnant-women-chronic-diseases-flu.html>

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