

Pregnancy, flu and importance of vaccination

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JA recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) finds that when mothers receive the flu vaccine, their babies experience fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits for the flu, particularly if the baby is under three months old or born to a mother who received the vaccine in the third trimester.

Pregnant women are among those at higher risk of complications of severe illness from [flu infection](#). Dr. Thomas Howell Jr., an OB-GYN at Mayo Clinic Health System, says it's not only important that those who are pregnant get a flu shot but also the people around them.

"Pregnant women are a group that should especially get a flu shot," says Dr. Howell. "We know that if you're pregnant, your risk of getting sicker from influenza, COVID or any pulmonary respiratory disease, for various physiologic reasons, is much higher."

Their health depends on the health of others during this flu season.

"We want [pregnant women](#) to protect themselves as much as they can. But one of the ways we do that is by protecting the community," says Dr. Howell.

He says flu vaccines are safe—including for the developing baby and mother.

"It's not a virus that the baby can get infected by. It doesn't give you the flu or make you sick (even though) everybody says, "Well, I still got the shot, and I still got the flu." The point of those immunizations is to keep you from getting sicker, especially gravely ill. And we know that if you're pregnant, your risk is much higher," says Dr. Howell.

The CDC recommends that everyone six months and older get a [flu shot](#) every year to help protect themselves and others against the spread of the virus. It's not too late to get vaccinated. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to become fully effective.

Tips to reduce your risks of respiratory infections:

- Stay home when sick.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based sanitizer on your hands if soap and water aren't available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid crowds when the flu is spreading in your area.
- Avoid being in close contact with others who are sick.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing, then wash your hands.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as counters, light switches or doorknobs. This can prevent the spread of infection from touching a surface with the virus on it and then your face.
- Practice good health habits. Get [regular exercise](#), sleep well, drink plenty of fluids, eat a [healthy diet](#) and manage stress.

Most people who become sick with the flu can recover independently at home. For those who are pregnant and others who may be at higher risk of complications from respiratory viruses, reach out to your health care team right away. There are antiviral medications and treatment options that may help you.

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