

Pregnant? Here's why researchers say you should get a flu shot

11 July 2016, by Michelle Wheeler, Sciencenetwork Wa

A positive pregnancy test comes with a barrage of often-conflicting advice about what to eat, how to exercise and when to turn to medication.

But a team of WA scientists hopes to make the decision to have a [flu jab](#) an easy one with the release of research suggesting the vaccine more than halves hospital stays for respiratory infections during pregnancy.

WA Health Department project officer Annette Regan, who led the study as part of her PhD thesis at UWA, says almost a third of hospital admissions for respiratory infection among pregnant women are for influenza.

"They're more than five times as likely as non-pregnant women in the same age group to end up in hospital [when they get the [flu](#)]," she says.

"During the pandemic...the mortality rate was highest in pregnant women compared to any other group.

"They are more likely to get these really, really bad infections, and that can be bad not only for the Mum but also for the baby."

Ms Regan's study of almost 35,000 expecting WA women found that those who did not get a [flu shot](#) were more than three times as likely to take a trip to the emergency department with influenza, pneumonia, bronchitis or another acute [respiratory tract infection](#) compared to women who had the vaccine.

Unvaccinated women were also more than twice as likely to be admitted to hospital with a [respiratory infection](#) than vaccinated women.

The study used data from 2012 and 2013, when only 8.7 per cent of pregnant women in WA had a flu jab.

But Ms Regan says immunisation rates have seen a lot of improvement in the last three years.

"We've just come up with estimates for 2015...and we were really pleased to see that it's increased to 60 per cent," she says.

"Obviously we'd like to see it get a lot higher than that because of all these benefits that we're seeing associated with vaccination—we'd love to see almost 100 per cent of [pregnant women](#) get vaccinated."

Ms Regan says previous research has shown the [flu vaccine](#) is safe to have in any trimester, and it is believed some antibodies cross the placenta and help protect the baby in the first six months of life.

"Flu season is imminent, we know it's going to start in the next couple of weeks," she says.

"This would be a good time if you haven't had a flu vaccine yet to book in with your GP or your clinic or your obstetrician."

More information: Annette K. Regan et al. Effectiveness of seasonal trivalent influenza vaccination against hospital-attended acute respiratory infections in pregnant women: A retrospective cohort study, *Vaccine* (2016). DOI: [10.1016/j.vaccine.2016.05.032](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2016.05.032)

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

APA citation: Pregnant? Here's why researchers say you should get a flu shot (2016, July 11) retrieved 23 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-07-pregnant-flu-shot.html>

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