

# Influenza In and Around Pregnancy (Flu)

The staff at North Carolina Women's Hospital is committed to protecting the health of you and your baby. Many women and families have heard a lot about the flu. Here are some commonly asked questions and answers about the flu.

## **What is the flu?**

The flu is a virus that affects the nose, throat, and lungs. It is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and other people breathe in the virus. It is also spread when a person touches something, such as a used tissue, that has flu virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.

## **Why is the flu important for pregnant women and newborns?**

Pregnant women and newborns are at high risk for developing very serious problems from the flu. Lung infections such as pneumonia can be very serious for pregnant women and newborns.

## **How can I prevent getting the flu?**

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu shot. FluMist® (the nose spray vaccine) cannot be used while pregnant or immediately after pregnancy. Many pregnant women will have already had their flu shot this year. If you have had your flu shot and you get the flu, it is likely that you will have a very mild case. If you live with someone who has the flu, your health care provider may provide you with a prescription for antiviral medicines that prevent the flu. You should avoid close contact with people who are sick, including visitors to your home to see you and your new baby.

## **How do I know if I have the flu?**

It is very hard to know if you have the flu, the common cold, or another respiratory illness. The symptoms of the flu are very similar to many other illnesses common in the wintertime

You may have the flu if you have:

- a fever, (temperature of or above 101°F (38°C))
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- headache, and
- extremely tired

Your health care provider can perform a test to determine if you have the flu.

To prevent the spread of illness:

- wash your hands often.
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing
- throw tissues away in a trash can
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- stay home when you are sick, if possible

**If I get sick this flu season, how should I take care of myself?**

You should get plenty of rest and drink a lot of water and juice. You can take *Tylenol* or *Extra-Strength Tylenol* for fever. For cough, you can take *Robitussin* (plain or DM). You can take *Actifed* (only if you do not have high blood pressure or some other chronic disease) for a cold. You can gargle with a warm salt-water solution (one teaspoon salt to one quart water) or use Chloroseptic spray for sore throat.

**When should I call my health care provider?**

You should call your health care provider if you have a fever greater than 101° (F) or 38° (C) AND a dry cough or breathing problems. Do not come to the hospital unless you have called your health care provider.

**Can my baby still receive my breast milk?**

Yes, it is important for your baby to continue getting your breast milk. The flu is not passed through breast milk. Wash your hands and wear a mask over your nose and mouth before uncovering your breasts and when breastfeeding your baby. Always wash your hands before and after breastfeeding.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact your health care provider, the UNC OB-GYN clinic at (919) 966-6823 from 8:30-4:30, or Labor & Delivery at (919) 966-3422

This information was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Key Facts about the Flu* and *Questions & Answers: The Disease* from [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) and UNC UOG *Common Problems in Pregnancy and Recommended Treatments*

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