

North Carolina Women's Hospital
Influenza In and Around Pregnancy
(Flu)

What is the seasonal flu?

The flu is a virus that affects the nose, throat, and lungs. It is spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. 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 seasonal 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 seasonal 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. 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 seasonal 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 seasonal 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.

What is H1N1 and what does it mean for me if I am pregnant?

H1N1 is a flu virus causing illness in people. This new strain was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread. You should use the same precautions as for seasonal flu to protect yourself from getting the virus.

We don't know if this virus will cause pregnant women to have a greater chance of getting sick or have serious problems. We also do not know how this virus will affect the baby. We do know that with seasonal flu pregnant women are more likely to get sick than others and have more serious problems. These problems may include early labor or severe pneumonia. We don't know if the H1N1 virus will do the same, but it should be taken very seriously.

What are the symptoms of H1N1?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu. Many people who have been infected with this virus have also had diarrhea and vomiting. You should contact your health care provider if you have flu-like symptoms so they can determine which type of flu you may have.

Signs that you are having severe complications include: difficulty breathing, chest pain/pressure, dizziness, confusion, severe vomiting, decreased movement of your baby, or a high fever that is not helped by Tylenol.

If you have questions or think you have the flu call your healthcare provider. If you are a UNC Hospitals patient: during clinic hours (Monday – Friday, 8:30a.m.-4:30p.m.) please call the OB/GYN nurse advice line at 919-966-6823. If it is after hours you should call the hospital operator at 919-966-4131 and ask them to page the OB/GYN provider that is on-call.

This information was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/flu and