

## **Flu Vaccine Recommendations During Pregnancy**

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter

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### **Pregnancy and the flu**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the yearly influenza vaccine for anyone aged six months or older.<sup>1</sup> This advice is especially critical for certain high-risk groups, like pregnant women. The CDC strongly recommends that all women who are pregnant, or plan on becoming pregnant during the flu season (September through May), receive the yearly influenza vaccine in order to protect their unborn child.<sup>1</sup> Pregnant women are more susceptible to acquiring the flu due to changes in their immune system. And the health risks associated with the flu for both the mother and her unborn baby are significant.<sup>2</sup> The flu vaccine is readily available this year and women are advised to seek immunization beginning in September.

One important caveat to note is that pregnant women ***should not*** receive FluMist®, the nasal spray formulation of the flu vaccine. FluMist® consists of live, but weakened influenza virus, which can cause flu-like symptoms in some people.<sup>3</sup> This year full protection against the flu requires only one vaccination (versus the two required last year to cover both the seasonal flu and H1N1).

### **Options for those unable to be immunized**

There are a select few patients who are ineligible to receive the flu vaccine. These include: patients with a severe egg allergy, those who have had a severe reaction to the influenza vaccine (including Guillain-Barre syndrome), and those with moderate to severe illness combined with a fever. Pregnant women with these contraindications can still protect themselves and their unborn baby from the flu and associated complications. Personal hygiene remains a mainstay in avoiding illness. This includes proper hand washing and avoidance of hand-eye, hand-mouth, and hand-face interactions, as well as contact with infected individuals.

### **What happens if you do get the flu?**

Pregnant women who become ill with the flu should stay at home, except when seeking medical help. They should have limited contact with other individuals. Symptoms of fever can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol) as it is approved for use in pregnancy. These women are encouraged to drink plenty of fluids to remain hydrated. A physician will determine if the use of antivirals is appropriate or necessary.<sup>2</sup>

**References**

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and control of influenza with vaccines: Recommendations of the advisory committee on immunization practices (ACIP) 2010. MMWR 2010 July 29; 59: 64p
2. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. What pregnant women should know about the flu. FLU.GOV [accessed 2010 Sept 15]
3. Flu mist [package insert]. Gaithersburg, MD: MedImmune LLC; July 2010.