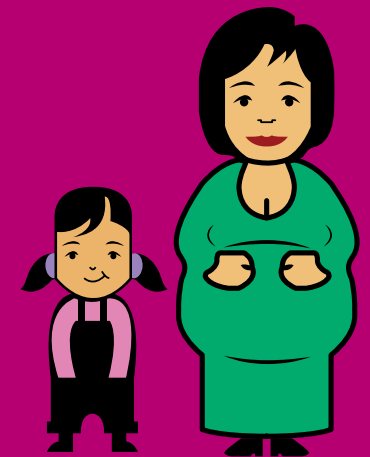


PREGNANCY AND FLU

Important information for pregnant women about the seasonal flu vaccine



Flu
Protect yourself
and others

To find out more about the flu vaccine, please contact your GP practice, speak to your midwife or visit www.nhs.uk

Please don't delay -
get the vaccine today to protect yourself and your baby

WILL THE VACCINE PROTECT ME COMPLETELY?



Most people who have the vaccine will not get flu. However, like any vaccine, it does not give 100% protection. The majority of people will be fully protected, some will get milder flu symptoms but a small number may still get flu.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE THE VACCINE?



As soon as possible - it will be available free of charge from October 2011 to all pregnant women and will protect you throughout this year's flu season.

WHERE CAN I GET THE VACCINE?



The vaccine is available from your local GP and from some ante natal clinics across the region. Please don't be complacent or wait until there is a flu outbreak this winter - talk to your midwife or GP today and book an appointment.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I ALREADY HAVE FLU?



Contact your GP urgently as you may need help in fighting off the virus with some antiviral treatment.



WHAT IS FLU?

Seasonal flu happens every year, usually in the winter. It's a highly infectious disease caused by a virus and spreads easily from person to person.

Flu is far more serious than a cold. Symptoms hit you suddenly and severely and usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles - you can often get a cough and sore throat at the same time.

A vaccine is available every year to protect those people who are most at risk - including pregnant women - from catching or spreading flu.



WHAT DOES THE VACCINE PROTECT AGAINST?

The vaccine will protect against three strains of the flu virus, including the H1N1 strain which caused the swine flu pandemic in 2009 and which continued to circulate last winter.

Every year, the most likely strains of flu that are expected to cause illness are identified in advance by the World Health Organisation. The vaccine is then produced and made available in October.



WHY DO PREGNANT WOMEN NEED THE VACCINE?

Pregnant women are particularly at risk from the H1N1 strain of the flu virus and this will be circulating again this winter.

Over the past two years a significant number of pregnant women in the north east have been critically ill in hospital suffering from flu - sometimes with devastating consequences.

This can be prevented by having the vaccine.



WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF FLU TO ME AND MY BABY?

Flu can cause serious illness in pregnant women and in the most severe cases can put the lives of expectant mums, and the lives of unborn babies, in unnecessary danger.

As a pregnant woman you are at increased risk of serious complications from flu. This is because your body and immune system is adapting to accommodate your growing baby and less able to fight off the flu virus.



IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN?

Yes - it is safe for you and your baby and can be given at any stage of pregnancy. The earlier you have the vaccine the better as this means you will be protected for the whole winter. The vaccine may also give your unborn baby some protection against flu during the first six months of life.



HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

There is **NO** live virus in the flu vaccine. The vaccine works by tricking your immune system into thinking it has been infected with the flu virus so that it creates antibodies against it.

About a week to ten days after you have had the flu vaccine, your body starts making antibodies to fight off what it thinks is a virus in the vaccine. If you are then exposed to the virus, your immune system will destroy the virus before it can cause any serious illness. The vaccine **CANNOT** give you the flu.



IS THERE ANYONE WHO SHOULDN'T HAVE THE VACCINE?

If you have had a serious allergy to the vaccine in the past or have a serious allergy to hens' eggs you will not be able to have the vaccine. This type of allergy is extremely rare. Please make sure you discuss this with your GP or midwife beforehand.

