

Influenza immunization information if you are pregnant, breastfeeding/chestfeeding, or have a newborn

What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs that is caused by a virus. Influenza can happen any time during the year, but it is most common in the winter.

How does influenza spread?

Influenza spreads:

- when a person with influenza sneezes, coughs, talks or even breathes
- if you breathe in the virus
- if you touch something that has the virus on it (like hands or a door knob), then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth

You and others can spread influenza before symptoms start.

How serious is influenza?

Most people who get sick with influenza will get better. The most common problem that can happen with influenza (called a complication) is pneumonia, a type of lung infection.

Influenza can also make other health problems worse. Even healthy, young people can get very sick and die from influenza.

The number of people who get sick with influenza is different from year to year. On average each year, about 12,000 people in Canada have to stay in the hospital because of influenza, and about 3,500 people die from it.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza starts suddenly and may include:

- a fever and chills
- a sore throat or cough
- a headache
- muscle aches
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling tired

Other symptoms may include feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), or having loose stool (diarrhea). These are more common in young children.

How can I protect myself and others against influenza?

The best way to protect yourself and others from influenza is to get the influenza vaccine.

You need to get immunized every year because the influenza virus changes. The best time for you and your

family to get immunized is October or November, before the influenza season begins. But you can get immunized any time during the influenza season which usually starts in late fall and lasts through the winter.

There are other ways to protect against influenza:

- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough or sneeze into your arm or a tissue, not your hand.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of influenza. You should get the influenza vaccine if you are age 6 months or older.

This vaccine is very important if you are pregnant. When you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of serious health problems from influenza.

Babies less than age 6 months are too young to be immunized. They also have a higher risk of serious health problems if they get influenza. It is important for anyone who cares for your baby to be immunized. This includes parents, grandparents, siblings, and anyone else who cares for your baby.

I am pregnant. Should I get the influenza vaccine?

Yes, you should get the influenza vaccine. You can get it any time during your pregnancy when the vaccine is available (October through March).

If you are pregnant and get influenza, you have a higher risk of serious health problems and needing treatment in the hospital. The illness could also cause loss of a baby during pregnancy (miscarriage or stillbirth) or cause the baby to be born too soon (premature birth).

Getting the influenza vaccine while you are pregnant has many benefits:

- It protects you and your baby.
- It protects your baby for a short time after birth.
- It lowers the risk of your baby being born too soon, being too small, or having a low birth weight.

How else can I protect myself and my baby?

To protect you and your baby, make sure everyone around you is also immunized against influenza. This is especially important for people who live in your home.

Is it safe to get the influenza vaccine while pregnant?

Yes. There are 2 strengths of inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine: standard-dose and high-dose. The virus these vaccines contain cannot cause influenza. They are given by injection. The standard-dose influenza vaccine is for most healthy people age 6 months to 64 years. Studies show that the standard-dose influenza vaccine will not harm you or your baby if you get it while you are pregnant.

The high-dose influenza vaccine has more of the inactivated influenza virus than the standard-dose. It gives more protection against influenza for people with a higher risk of getting very sick. People age 18 to 64 years who have had CAR T-cell therapy, who have had a stem cell transplant, or who have had or will have an organ transplant are recommended to get the high dose influenza vaccine.

Using the high-dose influenza vaccine in people under age 65 years is called “off-label use”. Off-label use means the vaccine is used differently than the way it was originally approved. Vaccine experts support this off-label use and have no safety concerns.

If you are pregnant and have had CAR T-cell therapy, a stem cell transplant, or have had or will have an organ transplant, talk to your healthcare provider about which influenza vaccine is recommended for you.

The nasal spray influenza vaccine is a live vaccine with a weakened living virus. It is **not** recommended if you are pregnant. It is safe for you and your baby to have contact with someone who gets the nasal spray influenza vaccine.

I am breastfeeding/chestfeeding. Should I get the influenza vaccine?

Yes. As a new parent, you are busy taking care of your baby and possibly older children. It is important that you take care of yourself by getting immunized.

The injected standard-dose and nasal spray influenza vaccines are safe to get when breastfeeding/chestfeeding.

If you have had CAR T-cell therapy, a stem cell transplant, or have had or will have an organ transplant, talk to your healthcare provider about which influenza vaccine is recommended for you.

I have a baby less than 6 months of age. How can I protect them from influenza?

Babies less than 6 months of age cannot get the influenza vaccine. This is why it is important for anyone who has contact with your baby to get the influenza vaccine.

You and others can spread influenza before symptoms start. It is not enough for others to stay away while they are sick. Ask them to be immunized.

For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/immunize



Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/influenza



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