

Influenza immunization information if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, 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 an infected person sneezes, coughs, or even talks
- 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

It is important to know that 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 a type of lung infection called pneumonia.

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

Each year, more than 12,000 people in Canada have to stay in the hospital because of influenza and 3,500 will die.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza starts suddenly and may include:

- fever
- chills
- sore throat
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling tired
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up) and loose stool (diarrhea) – This is 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 early in the fall (usually October or November), before the influenza season begins. But you can get immunized any time during the influenza season. The season starts in late fall and lasts through the winter.

Other ways to protect against influenza include:

- **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?

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

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

Babies less than age 6 months are too young to be immunized so they also have a higher risk of complications. 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 the vaccine at any time while you are pregnant. You are at higher risk for serious complications from influenza when you are pregnant.

- You have a higher risk of needing to be in the hospital if you get influenza.
- The illness may cause a problem for your baby, like being born too soon (called a premature birth).

Getting the influenza vaccine while you are pregnant:

- protects you and your baby
- protects your baby for a short time after birth
- lowers the risk of your baby being born premature, 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 those who live in your home.

Is it safe to get the influenza vaccine while pregnant?

Yes. Studies show that the influenza vaccine will not harm you or your baby if you get it while you are pregnant.

- The virus used in the influenza vaccine that is injected by a needle is inactivated (killed) and cannot cause influenza. This is the vaccine that is recommended if you are pregnant.
- The live nasal spray influenza vaccine is **not** recommended if you are pregnant. This type of influenza vaccine has a weakened living (live) virus. There is no risk to you or your baby if someone in your family or another close contact gets the live nasal spray influenza vaccine.

I am breastfeeding. Should I get the influenza vaccine?

Yes. There is no risk to your baby if you get the influenza vaccine while you are breastfeeding. Both types of influenza vaccines (injected and nasal spray) are safe to get when breastfeeding.

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.

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



Call Health Link at **811**



Go to **ImmunizeAlberta.ca**



Go to **MyHealth.Alberta.ca**



Go to albertahealthservices.ca/influenza/influenza.aspx

