

Influenza Immunization for Pregnant Women, Breastfeeding Women, and Families with Newborns

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 is influenza spread?

Influenza is easily spread when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or even talks. This virus gets into the air and can be breathed in by others. You can also be exposed to the virus when you touch something that has the virus on it (like hands or objects) and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. You can spread influenza before symptoms start.

How serious is influenza?

Most people who get sick with influenza will get better. The most common complication of influenza is pneumonia. Influenza can 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 3500 will die.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza starts suddenly and may include:

- fever
- sore throat
- runny nose
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches
- poor appetite
- feeling tired

Vomiting and diarrhea can happen but are more common in children.

How can influenza be prevented?

- **Get the influenza vaccine.**
This vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and other people from getting sick.

You need the immunization every year because the influenza virus changes. The best time for you and your family to be immunized is early in the fall, usually in October or November, before the influenza season begins. But you can be immunized at any time during the influenza season that starts in late fall and lasts through the winter.

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

Who should get influenza vaccine?

All Albertans age 6 months and older should get the influenza vaccine. This vaccine is very important if you are pregnant. You are at a higher risk of having complications from influenza.

Babies less than age 6 months are too young to be immunized so they are also at high-risk. 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 immunized against influenza?

Yes, you can get immunized at any time while you are pregnant. You are at higher risk for serious complications from influenza when you are pregnant.

- You are at higher risk of being admitted to hospital.
- The illness may cause a problem for your baby like premature birth.

Getting the influenza vaccine while you are pregnant:

- will protect you and your baby
- will protect your baby for a short time after birth because the protection transfers across the placenta
- lowers the risk of your baby being born premature, small for gestational age, 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. Recent studies show no harm to pregnant women or their babies when the influenza vaccine is given during pregnancy.

- The injectable (needle) influenza vaccine is inactivated. This means the virus in the vaccine has been killed and cannot cause influenza. This is the vaccine recommended for pregnant women.
- The live nasal spray influenza vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. However, there is no risk to you or your baby if a family member, or someone who has close contact with you and your baby, gets the live nasal spray influenza vaccine.

I am breastfeeding. Should I get immunized against influenza?

Yes. There is no risk to your baby if you get the influenza vaccine while you are breastfeeding. Both the injectable and the live nasal spray influenza vaccine are safe to get when breastfeeding.

As a new mother, you are busy taking care of your baby and possibly older children. It is important that you take care of yourself by being 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. The best way to protect your baby is to have everyone who has contact with your baby get immunized against influenza.

People who have influenza may not have symptoms but they can still spread the disease. It is not enough for people 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 **ahs.ca/influenza/influenza.aspx**

