



Flu Shots and Pregnancy

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants staff and patients to learn more about pregnancy and flu shots. Millions of pregnant women have received flu shots safely. Getting a flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and your baby from flu!

Flu Impacts Pregnancy

Flu is serious for everyone. It can cause more harm to pregnant women. Pregnancy can change heart, lung, and immune functions. More harm can result from flu even if you are healthy. Flu can cause fever. A high fever early in pregnancy may increase birth defects and other problems. If you get flu while pregnant, you are at greater risk of premature labor and delivery.

Flu Shots Are Recommended

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that pregnant women get a flu shot during any trimester of pregnancy. Free flu shots are offered at all VA health care facilities to enrolled women Veterans. For more information about receiving a flu shot in a VA medical center, contact your provider on the MyHealthVet Secure Messaging portal. For information about a flu shot within your community, visit www.va.gov/communitycare/flushot.asp.

Flu Shots Protect You

The flu shot protects pregnant women and their babies. It fights flu by helping your immune system make antibodies. Antibodies start protecting you and your baby about two weeks after getting the vaccine. They can stay with your baby up to six months after delivery and be passed on in breast milk if you breastfeed.

Babies can't get a flu shot until they are six months old. If you do not get a flu shot when pregnant, get one after delivery. Even if you get flu after having a flu shot, it can lower the impact of your symptoms. It can reduce how long you have flu. If you or your family get flu, it exposes your baby when s/he are most vulnerable.





If you are pregnant or considering pregnancy, talk to your provider about flu, flu shots, and other vaccines.



Flu Shots are Safe

The flu shot is one of the safest vaccines. It has been used for decades with a good safety record. Thousands of pregnant women have received a flu shot safely. Mild side effects include:

- soreness, tenderness, redness and/or swelling at the shot site
- headache
- muscle aches
- fatigue

Flu Comes From Others

During pregnancy and after, ask those who have regular contact with you and your baby to:

- Get a flu shot
- Keep hands clean
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Stay home when sick
- Avoid others who are sick

Flu Causes Illness

More harm may come from flu than from getting a flu shot. Call your provider right away if you have flu symptoms:

- cough
- body aches
- headaches
- fever or feeling feverish (chills)
- body or muscle aches
- feeling tired or weak
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

Antivirals are used to treat flu. They must be used within 48 hours from the start of symptoms. They can:

- shorten your illness
- reduce symptoms
- lessen the impact of flu

Learn More from CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm>

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/pregnant/flushot_pregnant_factsheet.pdf

https://tools.cdc.gov/podcasts/media/mp3/mmwr5_092613.mp3

https://tools.cdc.gov/podcasts/media/mp3/mmwr1_092613.mp3

