

The influenza vaccine

for pregnant women

Read more about immunisation for pregnant women and their babies at skai.org.au

Getting vaccinated against influenza (also known as 'the flu') during pregnancy will protect both you and your baby from a highly contagious viral infection that can have serious complications. The vaccine is free for all pregnant women in Australia, and is recommended for every pregnancy.

What are the risks of influenza for my baby now?

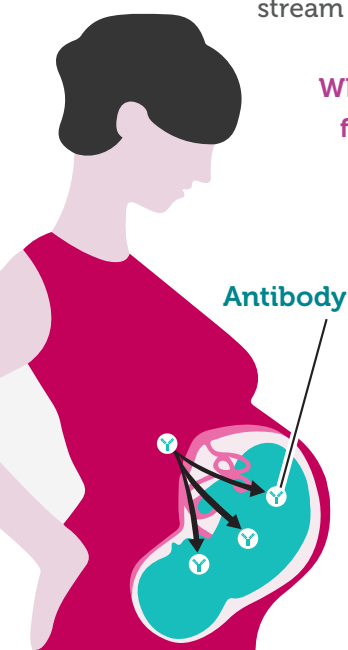
Influenza can cause complications during pregnancy or at birth. If you get influenza while you are pregnant, your baby may be born prematurely or with a low birthweight¹.

What are the risks of influenza for babies after they're born?

Influenza can be life-threatening for your baby. Babies under six months of age are too young to get the influenza vaccine themselves. The only way you can protect your baby against influenza is to get the vaccine yourself during pregnancy. Babies who catch influenza, especially babies under six months of age, are more at risk of developing serious complications and are more likely than other children to end up in hospital as a result². Those serious complications include pneumonia, bronchitis, inflammation of the brain or heart, bacterial infections and toxins in the blood stream (sepsis). It can even lead to death.

What are the risks of influenza for pregnant women?

Influenza can have very serious consequences for pregnant women. When you are pregnant, you are more likely to catch influenza than you would normally be. That's because being pregnant changes how your heart, lungs and immune system function. Pregnant women who catch influenza are more than twice as likely to be admitted to hospital³, are more likely to be admitted to intensive care, and may even die. Complications caused by an influenza infection include pneumonia, bronchitis, inflammation of the brain or heart.



Benefits for babies whose mothers were vaccinated against influenza



less likely to catch influenza at six months of age³



less likely to be admitted to hospital with influenza in the first six months⁴

Benefits for mothers



less likely to catch the influenza^{6,7}

How effective is the influenza vaccine?

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect yourself and your baby from influenza^{3,4,8}. You can read more research into vaccine effectiveness at skai.org.au.

How does the influenza vaccine work?

The influenza vaccine contains tiny fragments of the 'inactivated' influenza virus, called 'antigens'. Inactivated antigens cannot reproduce themselves or cause disease. When your immune system detects the antigens in the vaccine, it produces antibodies to fight them. When you are pregnant, the antibodies your immune system produces will cross the placenta and be transferred to your baby, so your baby has protection against the disease, too.

Is the vaccine safe for me and my baby?

Yes, the influenza vaccine is safe for pregnant women and for their babies. Research tells us that being vaccinated against influenza during pregnancy does not increase the risk of pregnancy complications such as stillbirth, premature delivery, birth defects or negative childhood health outcomes⁹⁻¹⁴. You can read more about this research at skai.org.au.

Is there a risk we could catch influenza from the vaccine?

No. There is no risk of catching the disease from the vaccine because it does not contain a live virus. The influenza vaccine recommended during pregnancy contains only 'inactivated' antigens.

How will I react to the vaccine?

Most people who have the influenza vaccine have no reaction at all. A small number of people have mild reactions that last between 12 and 24 hours and are easily treated at home. These include:

- redness or soreness at the spot where the needle went in
- headache
- mild fever of around 38.5° or less.

A very small number of people have a severe allergic reaction to vaccines, called 'anaphylaxis'. Anaphylaxis can lead to swelling, hives, breathing difficulties, lowered blood pressure and in severe cases, shock. Anaphylactic reactions to vaccination occur in about one in a million people¹⁵. Midwives, nurses and GPs are trained to respond to anaphylactic reactions with quick delivery of adrenaline.

If you have any worries about how you feel after your vaccination, you can get help from your doctor, or your nearest emergency department, or by calling Health Direct on 1800 022 222.

References

For links to the references used in this factsheet, please go to skai.org.au.

Vaccination risks

Risk of redness and soreness around the site of the injection

Around 3 in 100 women vaccinated against influenza during pregnancy experienced redness and soreness around the injection site¹⁸.



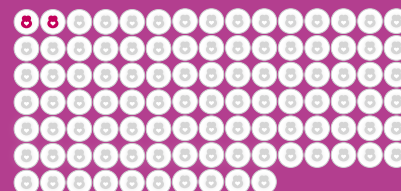
Risk of headache

Around 4 in 100 women vaccinated against influenza during pregnancy experienced a headache¹⁸.



Risk of a fever less than 38.5°

Around 2 in 100 women vaccinated against influenza during pregnancy experienced a fever of 38.5° or less¹⁸.



Risk of a reaction serious enough to see a doctor or attend a hospital

Around 1.5 in 100 pregnant women vaccinated against influenza had a reaction that required a visit to a doctor. Around 3 in 1000 attended hospital to recover from an adverse reaction to the influenza vaccine¹⁸.

