



Flu Vaccine

Information for Pregnant Women



www.hse.ie/flu

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About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you about the seasonal flu vaccine. It tells you why it is important to get the flu vaccine if you are pregnant. This leaflet also gives you other important advice and information such as when and how to get the vaccine.

Please read carefully.

What is seasonal influenza (flu)?

Flu is a very infectious illness caused by the influenza virus. The virus infects the airways and the lungs.

Flu circulates in the community during the flu season. The flu season usually starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

Can flu cause serious illness?

Yes, flu can cause serious illness and can be life threatening for pregnant women.

Pregnancy increases the risk of complications from flu infection because of changes in how the heart, lungs and immune system work during pregnancy. Complications of flu include pneumonia, bronchitis, and, on rare occasions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). The flu vaccine is very safe in pregnancy.

What is the flu vaccine?

A vaccine is a product that helps the body's immune system (defence system) to fight against infections. Each year, the flu viruses change, so each year the flu vaccine changes to provide protection against the strains of flu virus that are expected to spread during the flu season.

Why do I need to get the flu vaccine if I am pregnant during the flu season?

As you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of severe complications if you get flu. The flu vaccine gives you the best available protection against flu during your pregnancy, and it can also provide protection to your newborn baby during their first few months of life.

At what stage of pregnancy should I get the flu vaccine?

If you are pregnant during the flu season, you should get the flu vaccine.

Flu vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy, but the sooner you get it, the sooner you are protected.

I was pregnant at the end of the last flu season and received the flu vaccine then. I am still pregnant, so should I receive flu vaccine now?

Yes. The flu vaccine for this flu season is different from last season's vaccine and this vaccine will now give you the best available protection against the flu strains (types) that are expected to spread during the flu season.

How does the flu vaccine work?

The flu vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies (proteins that fight infection) to the flu virus. If you have had the flu vaccine and you come into contact with the flu virus, the vaccine can stop you from getting sick.

How long does it take the vaccine to work?

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks.

Is it safe for me to be vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccine is very safe in pregnancy. Flu vaccines have been given to pregnant women for over 50 years. The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommend the flu vaccine for all pregnant women in every pregnancy during the flu season. Getting the flu vaccine gives you and your baby the

best available protection against the serious complications of flu infection.

Who should not get the flu vaccine?

You should not get the flu vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

People with severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell) should speak to their GP or treating specialist doctor before getting a flu vaccine.

People on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab), should speak to their treating specialist doctor before getting the flu vaccine.

What about people with egg allergy?

Most people with an egg allergy can have a flu vaccine. Talk to your GP (Doctor) or Pharmacist.

When should you delay getting the vaccine?

There are very few reasons why you should delay getting the vaccine. However, you should re-schedule your vaccine appointment if you are unwell with a fever (temperature) greater than 38°C.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or Pharmacist about the best time to reschedule your appointment.

Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

No. The flu vaccine can't give you the flu.

What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?

Common side effects are mild. They may include soreness, redness and swelling where the injection was given.

Headaches, muscle pains and tiredness can also develop. These side effects may last for a few days.

Serious reactions are very rare; a severe allergic reaction occurs in one in a million people.

What if I don't feel well after flu vaccination?

If you have a temperature after the vaccine, you can take paracetamol. It is safe to take when you are pregnant and it helps you and your baby avoid getting a fever.

Do not take ibuprofen or aspirin to treat a temperature after vaccination.

Remember: If you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reason. Don't assume it is because of the flu vaccine.

If you have a temperature ring your GP (Doctor) for medical advice.

Where do I get the flu vaccine?

During pregnancy you can get the free flu vaccine from your GP (Doctor) or Pharmacist.

If you are a healthcare worker, your workplace may provide the vaccine at work. Please read the HSE leaflet on the flu vaccine for healthcare workers.

What does the flu vaccine cost?

The vaccine and the consultation with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist are **free**.

Please make an appointment with your GP (Doctor) or Pharmacist during this flu season.

For more information see: www.hse.ie/flu

You can also find a link to the patient information leaflet for the vaccine at www.hpra.ie. Search for Vaxigrip or Influvac influenza vaccines.

Are there other vaccines recommended in pregnancy?

For other vaccines recommended in pregnancy please visit <https://www2.hse.ie/pregnancy-birth/pregnancy-care/vaccines-needed/> and talk to your doctor or midwife.

Reporting side effects

If you think you or your child have had a side effect after receiving a vaccine, you can report it to the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) at www.hpra.ie. Your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or a family member can also report the side effect to the HPRA.



Protect yourself.
Protect others.

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