

Pandemic H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) & Pregnancy: What You Should Know

What is Pandemic H1N1 flu (formerly known as swine flu)?

Pandemic H1N1 flu is a respiratory infection caused by a new strain of flu virus responsible for outbreaks in many parts of the world. It has led to many hospitalizations and some deaths in certain parts of the United States.

How is Pandemic H1N1 flu spread?

Flu viruses are most often spread directly from person-to-person through droplets from a sick person when they cough or sneeze. However, you can also become infected with Pandemic H1N1 flu by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface such as a table, faucet or doorknob that has been contaminated by the flu virus.

What are the symptoms of Pandemic H1N1 flu?

Many of the symptoms of Pandemic H1N1 flu are the same as the symptoms of the seasonal flu. These include fever, dry cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and tiredness. The Pandemic H1N1 flu may also cause diarrhea and vomiting and can lead to serious complications for some people, including pregnant women.

Can Pandemic H1N1 flu be serious for pregnant women?

Yes. It can lead to serious problems including severe pneumonia and early labor for pregnant women. In the United States, about one out of every four pregnant women hospitalized in the intensive care unit with Pandemic H1N1 flu have died. There can also be serious complications to the fetus if a pregnant woman gets the flu.

How is Pandemic H1N1 flu treated?

Just like with seasonal flu, lots of fluids and plenty of rest away from work or school are recommended. Pregnant women may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) – NOT aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid), ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®), or naproxen (Aleve®) – for fever and body aches.

If you are pregnant, contact your healthcare provider as soon as you have flu-like symptoms or if you have close contact with someone who has H1N1 flu to learn whether you should seek treatment. Your provider may prescribe an antiviral medication to try to prevent more serious flu complications, make your illness milder, and make symptoms last a shorter period of time. These work best if they are taken within 2 days of when symptoms begin. Doctors may prescribe them even later for pregnant women since they are at high risk for flu complications.

Should pregnant women get the Pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine?

It is important for pregnant women to get **both** the H1N1 flu vaccine and seasonal flu vaccine. Pregnant women who get any type of flu are at greater risk for serious complications and hospitalization. While hand washing and staying away from sick people can help to protect pregnant women from getting the flu, vaccination is the single best way to protect against the flu. These vaccines can be given safely at any time during pregnancy.

Is the Pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine safe for pregnant women?

Influenza vaccines have not been shown to cause harm to pregnant women or their fetuses. Pregnant women should only get the “flu shot”, which is a vaccine containing killed viruses given with a needle. Pregnant women should **not** get a live intranasal influenza vaccine (nasal spray) because this contains weakened live viruses and is not approved for use in pregnant women.

[> more](#)

Can family members of pregnant women receive the nasal spray vaccine?

Yes. Family members and other close contacts of pregnant women who are healthy and not pregnant may receive the live nasal spray vaccine. Neither killed nor live weakened viruses from flu vaccines give you the flu. Instead, they actually help build the body's immunity (ability to recognize and fight off viruses) so that you are protected from active flu viruses that can cause you to be sick.

Does the H1N1 influenza vaccine have preservative in it?

Some influenza vaccines contain the preservative 'thimerosal'. There is no scientific evidence that thimerosal-containing vaccines are harmful to a pregnant woman or a fetus. The CDC recommends that pregnant women may receive vaccine containing thimerosal. However, some thimerosal-free seasonal and H1N1 vaccine will be available for pregnant women and children under three years of age.

Will getting a flu vaccine while pregnant protect my baby when he/she is born?

Past studies have found that when women get flu shots before giving birth, they help build immunity for their child. Plus, this makes it less likely that you will get the flu and spread it to your baby after he/she is born. So, getting vaccinated protects both you and your baby.

What should I know about Pandemic H1N1 if I am breastfeeding?

Pandemic H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines are safe if you are breastfeeding and may give some immunity to your baby. Getting vaccinated will also reduce your chance of getting the flu and passing it to your baby.

You can continue to breastfeed if you do get the flu, but you should protect your baby by washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes, and wearing a facemask (if available and tolerable). Because babies are at high risk for infection, a safer approach would be to have someone who is not sick feed your baby your pumped breast milk so you don't expose your baby to germs while feeding. You may also continue to take medications that your physician has prescribed for the flu while you are breastfeeding.

Should my newborn be vaccinated?

No. Newborns and babies younger than 6 months cannot receive the H1N1 or seasonal influenza vaccines. However, both vaccines are recommended when your child turns 6 months of age.

What else can I do to protect my family from Pandemic H1N1 flu?

Following some simple, everyday tips can help protect you and your family from the flu.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and/or use gel sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people. If you're in close contact with someone with H1N1 flu, ask your healthcare provider whether you need treatment to reduce your chances of getting the flu.
- If you're sick, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever ends.

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

(800) CDC-INFO or (800) 232-4636

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/pregnancy/

California Department of Public Health

(888) 865-0564

www.cdph.ca.gov

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/H1N1

Health Care Services: Dial 2-1-1

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