

## When is the best time to be vaccinated for flu?

The flu vaccine becomes available around early October. If you are pregnant you should get vaccinated soon so that you and your baby are protected. If you become pregnant later in the winter you should get the vaccine as soon as you know that you are pregnant.

## I received a flu vaccine in the past, do I still need this vaccine?

Yes. If you received a flu vaccine in the past, you still need to get the flu vaccine. Flu protection only lasts for one flu season, so it is important to get vaccinated every flu season. The vaccine available from this autumn protects against different strains of flu, so even if you were vaccinated as late as March 2023 you still need the new vaccine.

## How do I get the vaccine?

Your GP practice's website may have information, or phone your practice to hear their arrangements for flu vaccination.

## Summary

- The flu vaccine will help protect you and your baby from the effects of flu.
- Flu can have serious complications for pregnant women and their babies.
- The vaccine has been shown to be very safe for use in pregnant women.
- The flu vaccine will not give you the flu.

If you wish to discuss any of these questions in more detail please speak to a member of staff at the antenatal clinic or your GP.

For more information about the flu vaccine talk to your GP, midwife, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist, or visit:

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)  
[www.pha.site/flu](http://www.pha.site/flu)

This leaflet is available in other formats and languages. For further details visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)



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# Flu is more serious than you think

## Get the flu vaccine to protect yourself and your baby



## **Why it's important to protect yourself and your baby by getting the flu vaccine**

Flu is a highly infectious virus that occurs every year, usually in winter. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, aching muscles and sore throat. While it is a mild illness for most people, it can be very serious for some and may lead to pneumonia, hospitalisation and even death, although this is rare. Studies have shown that for some people with both COVID-19 and flu virus infections, there is an increased risk of complications and death, so it is more important than ever to get the vaccine.

Experience in the UK and other countries suggests that pregnant women are more likely to develop serious complications, and be admitted to hospital or, on rare occasions, be admitted to intensive care and even die, as a result of flu compared to women who are not pregnant.

Getting flu during pregnancy can also lead to increased risk of miscarriage, premature birth or having a low birth weight baby.

Receiving the flu vaccine during pregnancy helps protect both you and your baby from catching flu. Young babies are more at risk of being seriously ill if they catch flu because their immune (defence) system is not fully developed and they are too young to be given the flu vaccine. You will continue to be protected throughout the flu season, and therefore less likely to pass flu onto your newborn baby.

**The flu vaccine can help protect you and your unborn baby from the effects of flu.**

## **Is the vaccine safe for my baby?**

Yes. The flu vaccine is licensed for use in pregnancy by the European Medicines Agency. There is a lot of evidence that flu vaccines are safe in pregnancy for both you and your baby.

Since 2009, the UK and a large number of other countries have introduced routine flu vaccine programmes for pregnant women. Millions of pregnant women have received the seasonal flu vaccine and its safety has been carefully monitored. This has shown the vaccine to be safe for your unborn baby and for you.

## **Is there anybody who should not be vaccinated?**

Most people with a serious allergy to hens' eggs can now be given a flu vaccine but you need to discuss this or any other serious allergies with your midwife or doctor.

The flu vaccine should not be given to those who have had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous flu vaccine.

## **Does the vaccine cause any side effects in pregnant women?**

Flu vaccinations are very safe. There are no specific side effects during pregnancy. Pregnant women can suffer the same minor side effects as anyone else. You may get some soreness where the vaccine was injected. Less often, people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days after being vaccinated. Other reactions are very rare.

**The flu vaccine cannot give you flu.**



## **How does the vaccine work?**

About a week to 10 days after you get the flu vaccine, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with.

## **How effective is it?**

Flu vaccinations only protect against flu. There are many other viruses around every winter including COVID-19 which cause flu-like symptoms. A small number of people may get flu even if they have been vaccinated, but it is likely to be a milder illness than if they had not been vaccinated.