

# Pointers For Parents-To-Be

## Flu Risky For Pregnant Women Vaccination Best Defense Against The Flu

(NAPSA)—If you're pregnant, getting a flu shot this season should top your "to do" list. That's because influenza, or the "flu," can result in serious complications for pregnant women, including increasing your risk of hospitalization. Vaccination during pregnancy can help reduce the risk that a new mother will get influenza while pregnant or after delivery and pass it on to her newborn infant. Preventing influenza in infants less than 6 months old is critical, since they are the pediatric group at highest risk of complications but are too young to get vaccinated.

Generally worse than the common cold, the flu can cause high fever, headache, cough, nausea, weakness and muscle aches. Since pregnancy can weaken a woman's immune system, it places her at increased risk for serious flu-related complications. The biggest risk for pregnant women is viral pneumonia or dehydration, which can lead to serious consequences, according to experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That's why the CDC recommends that all pregnant women get a flu shot as soon as possible, even if the flu is already in the area.

Each year, on average, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and nearly 36,000 die in the U.S. from serious flu-related complications.

"The flu vaccine is the single best protection against flu," say health officials at the CDC. "Pregnant women should get a flu shot—not the nasal spray vaccine, since the nasal spray has not been approved for use in pregnant women." In addition, people who live with a pregnant woman or an



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infant under 6 months old should be vaccinated.

"The flu shot is safe and effective and cannot cause the flu," according to CDC experts. Pregnant women concerned about thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative in some flu vaccines, can request a flu vaccine without thimerosal from their physician or clinic.

In addition to getting vaccinated, CDC experts recommend everyday preventive actions to protect against the flu. These include covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; throwing the used tissue away; washing your hands often with soap and water; and taking antiviral drugs if you should get the flu, as advised by your doctor.

Other groups recommended for annual flu vaccination are children aged 6 months to their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday; people 50 years old and older; and adults and children with chronic medical conditions.

For more information, call CDC at (800) CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).