

Pregnant Women And Infants—Targets For The Flu

(NAPSA)—The risk from flu is greater for pregnant women because pregnancy can reduce the ability of the lungs and the immune system to work normally. This can be bad for both mother and baby. According to a study done during the first month of the 2009 H1N1 outbreak, the rate of hospitalizations was four times higher in pregnant women than other groups. Also, although pregnant women are about 1 percent of the U.S. population, they made up about 5 percent of U.S. deaths from 2009 H1N1 reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Young children, whose immune systems are still developing, are also at risk for flu-related complications. Each year, about 100 flu-related deaths in children are thought to occur in the U.S. During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, more than 300 deaths in children were reported to CDC. CDC believes many more deaths in children may have gone unrecognized or unreported.

Experts think the 2009 H1N1 virus will be around again this flu season. So one of the three parts of this season's flu vaccine will protect against the 2009 H1N1 virus. While CDC encourages everyone 6 months and older to get vaccinated against the flu, there is a special message for pregnant women and parents: "Don't pass up this easy way to protect yourself and your children against the flu," says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

"Getting a flu vaccine during pregnancy can reduce the risk of getting the flu while pregnant and after," says Dr. Schuchat. "And babies younger than 6 months can get very sick from flu but are too young to get vaccinated. The best way to protect them is to have



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their caregivers and close contacts vaccinated."

Seasonal flu vaccines have been given safely to millions of pregnant women and children over many years. Though there is no proof that thimerosal (a preservative) is harmful to pregnant women, their babies or young children, some worry about it. So, as before, vaccine companies are making plenty of preservative-free flu vaccine as an option for pregnant women and small children.

Usually worse than the common cold, the flu can cause fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and weakness. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. Pregnant women and parents of children younger than 2 years of age should call the doctor or nurse right away if they or their children become sick. A doctor can prescribe flu antiviral drugs.

Vaccination continues to be the best protection. To keep all family members healthy, get yourself—and all your children 6 months of age and older—vaccinated against the flu. One shot will last all flu season, even if you get it early in the season.

For more information, talk to your doctor or contact CDC at (800) CDC-INFO or www.flu.gov.