

What you need to know about **Influenza / Novel H1N1 flu virus and pregnancy**



What is influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as "the flu") is a serious, acute respiratory illness that is caused by a virus.

Influenza and pregnancy: the risk

Pregnant women are not more likely to get the flu, but if they do catch the novel H1N1 flu virus, they are more likely to suffer complications, like pneumonia and severe respiratory distress, which can put both mother and baby's health at risk. The risk of complications is greater in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

Severe complications from the flu could lead to early delivery or miscarriage.

How it is spread

- By breathing droplets that have been sneezed or coughed into the air by someone with the flu.
- By shaking hands with an infected person or touching a contaminated surface, and then touching your own eyes, nose or mouth.
- With influenza, you can be contagious from one day before the onset of symptoms to 3-5 days after onset of symptoms in adults, or 7 days after onset in children.
- With novel H1N1, you can be contagious one day before the onset of symptoms to 7 days after onset of symptoms in adults, or 7-10 days after onset in children.

Signs and symptoms

Fever, headaches, muscle pain, extreme fatigue, sore throat, runny nose and cough.

Protecting yourself before pregnancy

- Pregnancy can increase the risk of complications and hospitalization from influenza.
- Vaccination is recommended if you are planning a pregnancy during influenza season (October to April).
- A novel H1N1-specific vaccine is pending.

Protecting yourself during pregnancy

- Proper hand washing is very important.
- Practice proper coughing etiquette.
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected.
- Vaccination is considered safe during any stage of pregnancy.
- Pregnant women should continue normal activities like going to work, community events or worship services. Caution should be taken when you are around groups of people in close quarters with little control over personal contact.

If you are exposed to influenza

- **Early treatment can help reduce the risk of complications, so it is important that pregnant women contact a health professional as soon as they develop flu symptoms.**
- Be cautious with over-the-counter medications, and always consult a physician or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications.
- Influenza is usually self-limiting, meaning the illness will end on its own.

How influenza is treated

- Influenza can sometimes be treated with antivirals prescribed by your doctor if started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.
- Both Relenza® and Tamiflu® can be used for the treatment of influenza in pregnant women.

More information

- Call Oxford County Public Health at 519 539-9800 | 1 800 755-0394.
- Visit our website at www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth
- Information can also be found on the Health Canada and Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care websites.