Information about H1N1 flu for pregnant women

About H1N1 flu vaccine

Group Health recommends the H1N1 flu vaccine for all pregnant women. We will offer an inactivated (not live) vaccine for H1N1 flu that is safe for pregnant women.

General information about the H1N1 vaccine and how we will provide it is on our Web site at www.ghc.org.

Important note about preservatives in H1N1 vaccine

Certain flu vaccines contain preservatives to protect the medicine from spoiling before it is used. Some women are concerned about exposure to preservatives during pregnancy and the effects on the fetus. Washington state currently requires preservative-free vaccines for women due to consumer concerns. However, there is no evidence that the preservative in H1N1 flu vaccine (thimerosal) is harmful to a pregnant woman or her fetus.

A thimerosal-free vaccine for H1N1 will not be available with the initial supply of H1N1 vaccine. For this reason, the Washington State Department of Health has lifted the ban on giving H1N1 vaccine with thimerosal to pregnant women. This is because the risk of H1N1 during pregnancy is much greater than any possible risk of harm to the fetus from the vaccine.

Other concerns about H1N1 vaccine

While some women worry about the affect of vaccines on an unborn fetus, there have been no studies that suggest thimerosal causes harm to the fetus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that pregnant women may receive flu vaccine with or without thimerosal.

Talk with your health care provider about the H1N1 flu vaccine, and together you can decide if you should get the vaccine.

How the vaccine is given

When the H1N1 vaccine is available, it will be given in one dose. If the inactivated H1N1 flu vaccine is available when you receive a seasonal flu shot, you may receive both vaccines at the same time.
If you are sick with the flu

Pregnant women are at high risk for serious complications from all types of flu viruses. If you have flu-like symptoms, call your health care provider. You may need to take an antiviral drug, like oseltamivir (Tamiflu), for the flu. These medicines can make flu symptoms milder and prevent serious complications.

If you’ve been exposed to someone with flu-like symptoms, your health care provider may prescribe antiviral drugs to protect you from getting the flu.

Your health care provider will talk with you about the benefits and risks in taking these medicines while you are pregnant. If you have the flu, stay home and keep away from others for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. This includes not going to work, school, grocery stores, or other public areas and avoiding travel except to go to medical appointments.

Protect yourself from the H1N1 flu

These are important things you can do to protect yourself against the H1N1 flu:

- Talk with your health care provider about getting an H1N1 flu vaccination.
- Get a seasonal flu vaccination.
- Wash your hands often.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers frequently to clean your hands.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze with a tissue or into your elbow (not your hands), and throw the tissue into the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs are spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

For more information

- The Consulting Nurse Service is available to Group Health members who have medical questions or concerns. Call 24 hours a day 1-800-297-6877.
- Visit the Group Health Web site at www.ghc.org for more information.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides answers to common questions about the H1N1 flu. Visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm.