

Flu Vaccine

Information for Pregnant Women



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Information for Pregnant Women

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About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you about the seasonal flu vaccine. It tells you why it is important to get the flu vaccine if you are pregnant. This leaflet also gives you other important advice and information such as when and how to get the vaccine.

Please read carefully.

What is seasonal influenza (flu)?

Flu is a very infectious illness caused by the influenza virus. The virus infects the airways and the lungs.

Flu circulates in the community during the flu season. The flu season usually starts at the beginning of October and lasts until the end of April.

Can flu cause serious illness?

Yes, flu can cause serious illness and can be life threatening for pregnant women.

Complications of flu include pneumonia, bronchitis, and, on rare occasions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

Flu infection during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and even stillbirth.

Why do I need to get the flu vaccine if I am pregnant during the flu season?

As you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of severe complications if you get flu. The flu vaccine protects you against the flu during your pregnancy, and it will also provide protection to your newborn baby during their first few months of life.

Babies under 6 months are the children most likely to be admitted to hospital if they get flu.

What is the flu vaccine?

A vaccine is a product that helps the body's immune system (defence system) to fight against infections. Each year, the flu viruses change, so each year the flu vaccine changes to provide protection from the new strains of flu virus expected.

At what stage of pregnancy should I get the flu vaccine?

If you are pregnant during the flu season, you should get the flu vaccine.

Flu vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy, but the sooner you get it, the sooner you are protected.

I was pregnant at the end of the last flu season and received flu vaccine then. I am still pregnant, so should I receive flu vaccine now?

Yes. The flu vaccine for this flu season is different from last season's vaccine and this vaccine will now give you immunity (protection) from the flu strains (types) expected this flu season.

How does the flu vaccine work?

The flu vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies (proteins that fight infection) to the flu virus. If you have had the flu vaccine and you come into contact with the flu virus, the vaccine can stop you from getting sick.

How long does it take the vaccine to work?

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks.

Is it safe for me to be vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women. Flu vaccines have been given to pregnant women for over 50 years.

What about people with egg allergy?

Most people with an egg allergy can have a flu vaccine. Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

Who should not get the flu vaccine?

You should not get the flu vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of flu vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

You should not receive any flu vaccine if you have severe neutropenia (low levels of a type of white blood cell); except for those with primary autoimmune neutropenia.

People on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab), should speak to their treating specialist doctor before getting the flu vaccine, because of a potentially increased incidence of immune-related adverse reactions.

When should you delay getting the vaccine?

There are very few reasons why you should delay getting the vaccine. However, you should re-schedule your vaccine appointment if you are unwell with a fever (temperature) greater than 38°C.

Talk to your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist about the best time to reschedule your appointment.

Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

No. The flu vaccine can't give you the flu.

Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

No. The flu vaccine doesn't protect against COVID-19. It is important to get both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine. This is because Flu and COVID-19 are caused by different viruses.

Flu and COVID-19 can both cause serious illness and if you get them you might need to be admitted to hospital. It may be difficult to tell the symptoms of flu apart from the symptoms of COVID-19.

If you have had the COVID-19 vaccine you should still get the flu vaccine. You can get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine if it is offered to you.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Common side effects are mild. They may include soreness, redness and swelling where the injection was given.

Headaches, muscle pains and tiredness can also develop. These side effects may last for a few days.

Serious reactions are very rare; a severe allergic reaction occurs in one in a million people.

What if I don't feel well after vaccination?

If you have a temperature after the vaccine, you can take paracetamol. It is safe to take when you are pregnant and it helps you and your baby avoid getting a fever.

Do not take ibuprofen or aspirin **unless** advised by your Doctor.

Remember: If you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reason. Don't assume it's the flu vaccine.

If you have a temperature ring your GP (Doctor) for medical advice.

Where do I get the flu vaccine?

You can get the flu vaccine from your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist.

If you are a healthcare worker, your workplace may provide the vaccine at work.

What does the flu vaccine cost?

The vaccine and the consultation with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist are **free**.

Please make an appointment with your GP (Doctor) or pharmacist during this flu season.

For more information see: www.hse.ie/flu

You can also find a link to the patient information leaflet for the vaccine at www.hpra.ie. Search for Influvac Tetra or Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine.

Privacy Statement: In order to administer vaccine(s) safely, and to record all of the necessary data for monitoring and managing vaccine(s), the HSE will be processing your personal data. All data processed by the HSE will be in accordance with the various data protection legislation including the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018, the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR), and the Health Identifiers Act 2014. The processing of your data will be lawful and fair. It will only be processed for specific purposes including, to manage the vaccinations, to report and monitor vaccination programmes, to validate clients and provide health care. Data sharing between HSE departments may also occur.

National Immunisation Office

www.hse.ie/flu

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