

Flu levels high, vaccination rates low among pregnant women

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu activity around the nation is increasing. Vaccination can help prevent serious illness, especially in high-risk groups, like pregnant women, but

the CDC says that's the group showing lower [vaccination rates](#).

"Pregnant women are a group that should especially get a [flu shot](#)," says Dr. Thomas Howell Jr., an OB-GYN at Mayo Clinic Health System. We know that if you're pregnant, your risk of getting sicker from influenza, COVID or any pulmonary respiratory disease, for various physiologic reasons, is much higher."

Dr. Howell says flu vaccines are safe for the developing baby and mother.

"It's not a virus that the baby can get infected by. It doesn't give you the flu, and it doesn't make you sick (even though) everybody says, 'Well, I still got the shot, and I still got the flu.' The point of those immunizations is to keep you from getting sicker, especially very gravely ill. And we know that if you're pregnant, your risk is much higher."

The CDC recommends everyone six months and older get a flu shot every year to help protect themselves and others against the spread of the virus. It's not too late to get vaccinated. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to become fully effective.

Other respiratory viruses, including [respiratory syncytial virus](#) (RSV) and COVID-19, continue to spread, along with the flu. There are vaccines for influenza and COVID-19, and there is hope for a vaccine for RSV by the end of 2023.

Other [safety measures](#) to reduce your risks of respiratory infections include:

- Stay home when sick.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

- Use an alcohol-based sanitizer on your hands if soap and water aren't available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid crowds when the flu is spreading in your area.
- Avoid being in close contact with others who are sick.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing, then wash your hands.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as counters, light switches or doorknobs. This can prevent the spread of infection from touching a surface with the virus on it and then your face.
- Practice good health habits. Get [regular exercise](#), sleep well, drink plenty of fluids, eat a [healthy diet](#) and manage stress.
- Consider masking in crowded indoor locations, especially if you have risk factors for severe flu or COVID-19.

Most people who become sick with the flu can recover independently at home. For those who are pregnant and others who may be at higher risk of complications from these respiratory viruses, reach out to your health care team right away. There are antiviral medications and treatment options that may help you.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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