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Wissen, was schützt.

Flu Vaccination

Vaccination during pregnancy protects
both mother and unborn child.





Staying healthy during pregnancy

During pregnancy, the well-being and health of mother and unborn child come first.

A flu (influenza) can be detrimental to the health of mother and unborn child. During pregnancy, the risk of severe cases of flu with complications such as pneumonia which must be treated in hospital rises. In addition, having the flu during pregnancy increases the risk of delayed growth and miscarriage or premature birth.

Seasonal flu: preventable risk to mother and child

The Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO), an independent group of experts, recommends all pregnant women have the flu vaccine to protect against the seasonal flu. This vaccination has been proven to offer effective protection for mother and child.

Seasonal flu: What is it?

A real flu (seasonal Influenza) is a highly infectious disease. Flu outbreaks occur regularly in this hemisphere during wintertime. The chance of becoming infected is particularly high during this season.

Influenza viruses are transmitted by tiny droplets, for example when people speak or cough, as well as by hands or touching contaminated surfaces. The viruses infect the mucous membranes or upper respiratory tract, causing the typical symptoms such as a dry cough and sore throat, and making the body more susceptible to certain bacterial viruses.

Symptoms of a **true bout of flu**

- ▶ Sudden onset accompanied by fever ($\geq 38.5^{\circ}\text{C}$)
- ▶ dry irritating cough
- ▶ Headache, sore throat, aches and pains in the joints and muscles
- ▶ Fatigue and occasionally, nausea/vomiting

The flu can even cause serious complications such as pneumonia or myocarditis.

Whereas the common cold, caused by different types of viruses, comes with much milder symptoms and subsides after a few days.

**GOOD TO
KNOW**

The flu vaccination does not offer protection against the common cold.

Why is the flu dangerous during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, the immune system is less active. This is to protect the unborn child and to keep it from being attacked by the body. It also means however, that women are more susceptible to infection.

In addition, respiration and circulation change during pregnancy, thereby increasing the risk of a serious bout of the flu.



Limited treatment options during pregnancy

Each drug administration during pregnancy must be carefully considered as the healthy development of the child and safety of the mother are the utmost priority. The same also applies to antiviral drugs which are only administered after strict examination has been performed on a case-by-case basis.

Antibiotics are ineffective in combatting a viral infection such as the flu because they are only suitable for treating bacterial infections. For this reason, antibiotics are used at most for a simultaneous onset of complications caused by bacteria while also observing precautionary measures.

That is why: Prevention through vaccination is better than treatment.



How can I protect myself?

The best protection against flu is receiving a vaccination in time before the flu season starts. It helps the body produce antibodies against flu viruses.

**VACCINATION
RECOMMENDED**

The STIKO recommends vaccination against seasonal flu to all healthy pregnant women from the fourth month of pregnancy. Pregnant women with chronic primary disease such as asthma, diabetes or high blood pressure should be vaccinated in the first trimester.

Annual reformulation of vaccine

The vaccine against seasonal flu is adapted to the current strain each year. Until recently, only trivalent vaccines were available to protect against the three strains of virus most likely to become widespread in the next season. A quadrivalent vaccine to protect against four strains of the virus has been available since the 2013/14 season.

As with any type of medical treatment, not every person reacts the same to each of the different active ingredients. In individual cases in which pregnant women became infected with flu, the illness was milder.



**GOOD TO
KNOW**

The costs of the recommended vaccination are covered by insurance.

Good tolerability for mother and child

Pregnant women are only administered a vaccination with dead virus particles. This eliminates the risk of mother and child from becoming infected with the flu virus.



Safety of vaccination confirmed

The safety of the vaccine for both pregnant women and unborn children has been confirmed through a number of studies. An increase in the number of serious reactions due to the vaccine was not determined. There was neither an increase in the number of premature births or caesarean sections, nor were there differences in the babies' state of health after birth.

When should I get the vaccine?

The vaccine is not advised for those people allergic to one of the active ingredients or a severe allergy to egg whites. Please consult your doctor.



A much-needed vaccination may optionally also be conducted under close monitoring in a clinic setting.

Risks: possible side effects

Possible side effects of the flu vaccination may commonly include reddening and soreness at the site of the injection. Fever, nausea or muscle pain are uncommon. These symptoms are generally harmless and indicate that the immune system is being activated. Serious side effects such as rash or allergic immediate reaction only occur in extremely rare cases.

One thing is sure: The risks associated with vaccination are significantly lower than the risk of contracting a serious bout of influenza!



Double benefit

Vaccination also protects children after birth. That is because antibodies are passed to the child by the placenta and is called 'passive immunity'. This is vital protection as flu has been commonly connected to complications in children during the first year of life. Infants can be vaccinated against the flu only from the first six month of life.

**GOOD TO
KNOW**

Anyone who has regular contact to a newborn should consider the flu vaccination to protect themselves as well as the infant.





Additional protection: practice good hygiene

The risk of picking up the virus can also be reduced in conjunction with the flu vaccine by practicing good hygiene:

- ▶ Wash your hands frequently with soap
- ▶ If you do become infected, keep a distance to other people
- ▶ try not to use tissues more than once and dispose of them quickly
- ▶ Cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm and not in your hand to prevent the spread of viruses/bacteria

Further information

on vaccinations can be found at:

- ▶ www.impfen-info.de/grippe
- ▶ www.infektionsschutz.de
- ▶ www.rki.de/impfen

on healthy growth and development at:

- ▶ www.kindergesundheit-info.de

Imprint

Editor: Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA),
50819 Cologne, Germany

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Developed in cooperation with the Robert Koch-Institut.

Design: dotfly GmbH, Cologne, Germany

Version: June 2016

Copies: **XX.XX.XX.XXXX**

Order no. 62005006

Images: iStock, Fotolia, Boris Breuer Fotografie

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für
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Aufklärung