

Seasonal Flu: Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

To help keep moms and babies well, the World Health Organization and the Public Health Agency of Canada recommend that all pregnant women receive the influenza (flu) vaccine.

- Pregnant women are at higher risk for getting the flu and being sicker with it.
- Being vaccinated during pregnancy will not only protect mom's health, but also the health of the fetus and newborn.
- Babies under six months of age can be protected against the flu if their mom was vaccinated during pregnancy, vaccination of other people in close contact will also help to protect them. Babies older than six months can get the flu vaccine.
- Breastfeeding and breastmilk protect baby's health during the flu season. Breastmilk contains antibodies and other substances that will help the baby fight off infections. Breastfeeding moms should receive the flu vaccine if they have not received it this flu season.

This year's flu vaccine helps protect individuals from several strains of flu, including H1N1.

What general hygiene measures can I take to protect my baby and myself from getting the flu?

- The flu virus is passed from person-to-person through coughs and sneezes.
- Always practice good hygiene including frequent hand washing with soap and hot water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Use clean tissues to cover your nose or mouth when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue immediately after using it.
- Ask family and friends to delay their visit if they have a cough, fever or other flu symptoms.
- Keep your baby close to you and limit close contact by non-caregivers.
- Avoid taking your infant out into crowds.
- Avoid using pacifiers and artificial teats as they are hard to keep properly cleaned and can spread flu viruses.
- Use clean blankets and burp cloths.



Photo credits: Jessica Dwyer Milley, Charla Cook, Vanessa Murrav. and Danielle O'Neill.

Can I continue to breastfeed if I have the flu? Yes. Breastfeeding should continue even if you have the flu. Wash your hands well before breastfeeding and holding your baby. You should wear a face mask when breastfeeding or in very close proximity to your baby if you have flu symptoms. Use a clean cloth blanket to cover your clothes while breastfeeding. It is thought that the flu virus is not passed on to a baby through breastmilk.

Can I continue to breastfeed if I am receiving anti-viral treatment? Yes. Breastfeeding should continue if you are taking Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamivir) as both medications are considered safe while breastfeeding. Low dosages of the anti-viral medication are passed to the baby through breastmilk. Over the counter drugs such as acetaminophen for fever and ibuprofen for muscle pain are generally used by breastfeeding mothers and are safe.

What if I am too sick to breastfeed? If you are too sick to breastfeed your baby, your breastmilk can be expressed and provided by a caregiver using a cup, spoon, syringe, eye dropper or bottle. Keep up your milk supply by regular expression if you are not directly feeding your baby. Call your public health nurse or family doctor if you need advice.

Can I breastfeed if my baby has the flu? Yes. Keep breastfeeding if your baby becomes ill with the flu. Sick babies need to breastfeed more often to increase their fluid intake. Continued breastfeeding may also help reduce the severity of your baby's respiratory symptoms. Have your baby seen by a physician if the baby is sick and having trouble breathing or breastfeeding.

For more information on the flu, the vaccine or flu shot clinics throughout the province, contact your primary health care provider or call the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Line toll-free 1-888-709-2929. People may also wish to visit the RHA websites for more information.



November 2014