

If you are expecting, you may be wondering “what if I get novel H1N1 influenza while I am pregnant?” Pregnant women with novel H1N1 flu seem to be more likely to become sicker than other people with novel H1N1 flu. We know that pregnant women with regular, seasonal flu may have problems, such as early labor or severe pneumonia. We do not know if pregnant women with novel H1N1 flu will also have these problems. But, just in case, any type of flu should be taken very seriously by pregnant women.

For the best protection of all – get vaccinated. Pregnant women will be among the first people eligible to get the novel H1N1 flu vaccine. Talk to your doctor about getting this new vaccine as soon as it is available. In the meantime, be sure to get vaccinated against seasonal flu. Seasonal flu can cause serious problems in pregnant women and place them and their pregnancy at risk of serious complications.

To further protect yourself, your baby and family

Take these everyday steps to help prevent the spread of germs and reduce your risk of getting the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or sneeze into your sleeve. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based gel hand cleaners are also good to use.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. (If you are pregnant and you live or have close contact with someone who has the flu, talk to your doctor about medicines to prevent flu.)
- Have a plan to care for sick family members.
- Stock up on household, health and emergency supplies, such as water, acetaminophen (Tylenol®), and non-perishable foods.

Watch for flu symptoms

Symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are like those of seasonal flu and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Chills and fatigue and
- Sometimes, diarrhea and vomiting.

If there is novel H1N1 flu in your community, pay extra attention to how you are feeling. If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home, limit contact with others, and **call your doctor right away**. Your doctor will decide if testing or treatment is needed.

If you have close contact with someone who has novel H1N1 flu or flu-like symptoms, or is being treated for exposure to novel H1N1 flu, contact your doctor to discuss whether you need antiviral drugs to reduce your chances of getting the flu.

Treatment for novel H1N1 flu is similar to the treatment for regular, seasonal flu.

Treat any fever right away.

- Use acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) to lower fever.
- Drink plenty of fluids to replace those you lose when you are sick.
- Your doctor will decide if you need antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) or Relenza® (zanamivir).

Antiviral drugs are prescription pills, liquids or inhalers that fight against the flu by keeping the germs from growing in your body. If you are exposed to the flu, ask your doctor if you should take them to prevent illness. If you get the flu, these medicines can make you feel better faster and make your symptoms milder. Antiviral medicines work best when started soon after symptoms begin (within two days), but they may also be given to very sick or high risk people (like pregnant women) even after two days.

Seek emergency medical care right away if you have:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Decreased or no movement of your baby
- A high fever that is not responding to acetaminophen.

A word about breastfeeding

Mothers who are breastfeeding can continue to nurse their babies while being treated for the flu. Breastfeeding protects babies.

Continue breastfeeding even if you have the flu. Remember, a mother's milk is made to fight diseases in her baby. This is really important in young babies when their immune system is still growing. Babies who are breastfed do not get as sick and are sick less often from the flu than are babies who are not breastfed.

While you are ill with the flu you may need to increase the amount of liquids you drink even more than you usually do while breastfeeding.

While breastfeeding, be careful not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Your doctor might ask you to wear a mask to keep from spreading the flu virus to your baby.

Do not stop breastfeeding if you are ill. Limit formula feeds if you can. If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump and have someone give the expressed milk to your baby.

For more information, go to www.nyhealth.gov or www.flu.gov. Check with your doctor if you have specific questions or concerns.