



Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Department of Public Health

Office of the Secretary of Public Health



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PRESS RELEASE

Pregnancy and the Flu

The 2009 H1N1 flu and the seasonal flu are present in our community. Although the H1N1 flu is a new flu, it seems to be mild for most people but some individuals are more likely to get sick than others.

Recent information indicates that pregnant women are at higher risk than others for the flu. Studies show that illnesses like colds and the flu can last three times longer in pregnant women and sometimes can be very severe in pregnancy. While catching the flu during pregnancy rarely causes birth defects, pregnancy can increase your risk for flu complications such as pneumonia. **The best way to have a healthy pregnancy is to prevent the flu altogether.**

The Department of Public Health would like to provide pregnant women with information they can use to prevent the flu this year.

What is the best way to prevent the flu during my pregnancy?

To prevent the flu, get vaccinated! A flu shot is the best way to prevent the flu.

The CNMI received its first batch of the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccines last month which are reserved for pregnant women and health care and emergency medical services workers.

The Department of Public Health is urging all pregnant women in the CNMI to get their 2009 H1N1 flu shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that pregnant women get both the seasonal flu shot and the 2009 H1N1 flu shot. However, since the 2009 H1N1 flu is the predominant flu virus circulating worldwide, pregnant women should make it a priority to get the 2009 H1N1 flu shot.

Pregnant women must be seen by their primary care provider in order to be vaccinated. If a pregnant woman does not have a primary care provider, they should schedule an appointment to see one by contacting the clinics listed below that administer the 2009 H1N1 flu shots.

Department of Public Health Clinics:

1. Women's Clinic (Commonwealth Health Center)
2. Southern Community Wellness Center in San Antonio
3. Tinian Health Center
4. Rota Health Center

Private Clinics:

1. Pacific Medical Center
2. Medical Associates of the Pacific (Dr. Ada's Clinic)
3. Saipan Health Clinic
4. Marianas Medical Center
5. FHP
6. Dr. Hocog's Clinic

Is the flu shot dangerous during pregnancy or during breastfeeding?

Seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu shots do not contain a live virus and cannot give you the flu. There is, however, a nasal flu vaccine called FluMist that contains weakened flu viruses. The **nasal flu vaccine is not recommended** during pregnancy because it has not been tested in pregnant women.

After receiving a flu shot, some women do have fatigue and muscle aches due to their immune system responding to the vaccine. The shot takes about two weeks to work.

Both the annual flu shot and 2009 H1N1 flu shot is safe while breastfeeding and it cannot cause you or your nursing baby to get sick. In fact, receiving the flu shot while pregnant can give some protection to your unborn baby.

To prevent exposure to the flu during pregnancy:

- **WASH YOUR HANDS** often with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially after you cough or sneeze. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- **AVOID SICK PEOPLE & AVOID TOUCHING YOUR EYES, NOSE, AND MOUTH.** (Germs spread this way). Remember, other people can take care of sick family members and friends, but *only you* can take care of your baby growing inside you.
- **TEACH** others how to prevent the flu.
- **COVER YOUR COUGH OR SNEEZE** with a tissue or your sleeve not your hands! Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- **HAVE** an emergency plan ready in case you get sick and keep a two weeks supply of food and emergency supplies and medicine at home.

How do you treat symptoms of the flu during pregnancy?

Most cases of the flu do not require medical attention. Unfortunately, many flu and cold medicines have not been well studied in pregnancy. If you are pregnant and have the flu, please call your doctor before taking any over-the-counter or prescription medications.

Medications to avoid during pregnancy include:

- *Aspirin and ibuprofen.* Aspirin may cause bleeding. Ibuprofen hasn't been studied in pregnant women.
- *The expectorant guaifenesin and the cough suppressant dextromethorphan.* These are commonly found in cold and flu medicines and cough syrups. Their safety is either unknown or they have been linked to pregnancy complications in animal studies.

What flu medications are safe to take during pregnancy?

Medications that your doctor may suggest during pregnancy include:

- *Acetaminophen* , the preferred treatment for aches and pains of flu and colds during pregnancy
- *Chlorpheniramine*, the antihistamine of choice for pregnant women
- *Pseudoephedrine*, the decongestant of choice during pregnancy *after* the first trimester. **Do not use pseudoephedrine in the *first trimester*** because it has been linked to developmental problems within the fetus's digestive system.

These medications are found commonly in over-the-counter cold and flu remedies. Check labels carefully.

What are some other ways to relieve flu symptoms during pregnancy?

Try these three natural flu remedies during pregnancy:

- Get plenty of bed rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids, such as water, juice, and caffeine-free tea.
- Use sugar or honey-based lozenges to relieve sore throats and cough.

When to call a doctor?

Call your doctor if:

- You have trouble breathing,
- Your symptoms don't improve or get worse after three to four days,
- After feeling a little better, you develop signs of a more serious problem. Some signs of a more serious problem are a sick-to-your-stomach feeling, vomiting, high fever, shaking chills, chest pain, or coughing with thick, yellow-green mucus.

To learn more about the flu, visit www.flu.gov or email fluwatchcnmi@gmail.com .