



# Influenza VIP (vaccination-in-pregnancy)

## Influenza vaccination during pregnancy is very important

**Influenza (flu)** is a virus that spreads mainly by coughing, sneezing, and close contact.

Australia's influenza season usually occurs between July and October.

It takes about 2 weeks for protection to develop after vaccination, and protection is expected to last through the influenza season. Protection from the vaccine may start to decrease after 3 to 4 months.

Influenza strikes suddenly and can last several days. Symptoms vary by age, and can include:

- fever
- sore throat
- fatigue
- headache
- chills
- muscle aches
- cough
- runny, stuffy nose.

Influenza can cause serious infection, even in healthy people. It can cause complications affecting immune, heart, lung and brain function. Pregnant people who get influenza are at higher risk of hospitalisation than non-pregnant people. It may even be life-threatening.

Influenza is also dangerous to your unborn baby as it increases the chance for serious problems, such as premature labour and delivery.

WA research shows that getting the influenza vaccine during pregnancy reduces the risk of stillbirth by 51 per cent. Infants of parents who were vaccinated are 50 per cent less likely to be admitted to hospital with influenza.

When you get vaccinated during pregnancy, your body will pass on protective antibodies, proteins produced by the body to fight diseases, to your baby through the placenta. This is the most effective way to protect them in their first few months of their life when they are most vulnerable to severe influenza infection and are too young to be fully vaccinated.

The Australian Government and Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recommend that all pregnant people be offered vaccination against influenza.

## When to get vaccinated

Several brands of influenza vaccines are available from April to the end of influenza season. The influenza vaccine can be given at any time during pregnancy. It is recommended to get it during your second or third trimester as serious complications from influenza are most likely to occur during this period.

### **The vaccine cannot cause influenza.**

All influenza vaccines recommended for pregnant people contain inactivated virus.

As the virus is always changing, a new influenza vaccine is made every year to protect against the strains that are likely to cause illness in the upcoming season. A single dose of influenza vaccine is recommended every influenza season.

Influenza vaccination cannot prevent:

- you contracting influenza caused by a strain not covered by the vaccine
- illnesses that resemble influenza-like symptoms but are not influenza.

## Influenza vaccine safety for pregnancy and baby

Since 2012, the WA Department of Health has monitored safety of influenza vaccine in pregnancy every year. They have not identified any serious safety issues for pregnant people or their babies following vaccination.

Breastfeeding after getting the influenza vaccine during pregnancy is also safe and will pass on more protection against influenza to your baby after birth.

You can safely have the whooping cough, influenza, and maternal RSV vaccine in the same visit when you are 28 to 36 weeks pregnant. You can also get them at different visits, as recommended by your immunisation provider.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored.

People with an egg allergy, including anaphylaxis, can be safely vaccinated with influenza vaccines containing less than 1 microgram of residual egg protein per dose.

## People not recommended to get the vaccine

There are some people who should not get the vaccine. Tell the person who is giving you the vaccine if you have ever had:

- a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of any influenza vaccine or a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine
- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) – people with a history of GBS may have a higher chance of developing GBS following influenza vaccination. Patients with GBS are usually hospitalised and the diagnosis must be made by a physician.

## Possible side effects

There is potential for side effects with any medicine, including vaccines. They are usually mild and go away on their own, and serious reactions are possible but very rare. There is a very small chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death. Most people who get an influenza vaccine do not have any problems with it.

The most common side effects after influenza vaccination are:

- pain, redness or swelling at the injection site
- headache
- muscle ache
- fever
- nausea
- tiredness.

If these symptoms occur, they are usually mid and last 1 to 2 days. None of the common side effects can harm the baby.

People sometimes faint after a medical procedure, including vaccination. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy, experience vision changes, or hear ringing in your ears.

Sometimes vaccinations can cause serious problems like severe allergic reactions. Life-threatening allergic reactions to vaccines, for example Guillain-Barré syndrome, are very rare – up to one in a million doses of influenza vaccine.

Always tell the person giving the vaccine if you have any severe allergies or if you have ever had a severe allergic reaction following a vaccination.

Some people get severe pain or difficulty moving the shoulder where a vaccine was given. This happens very rarely.

## Serious reactions

Look out for signs of a severe allergic reaction, high fever, unusual behaviour, and anything that concerns you.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- hives
- swelling of the face or throat
- difficulty breathing
- fast heartbeat
- dizziness
- weakness.

If severe reactions occur, they usually begin within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

## When to seek help

For severe reactions, call an ambulance or go to your closest emergency department. Call your immunisation provider if you have a reaction you think is serious or unexpected. Healthdirect is also available on 1800 022 222.

Significant and unexpected reactions should be reported to the [Western Australian Vaccine Safety Surveillance](#) (WAVSS) system:

Email: [wavss@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:wavss@health.wa.gov.au)  
Phone (08) 6456 0208



## More information?



[AusVax Safety](#) website



[Australian Government](#) website

Name of vaccine recipient: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_

Vaccinator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Batch number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Apply sticker or write in)

Brand name:  Vaxigrip  Flucelvax

You can access your immunisation history statement from Medicare or by calling the Australian Immunisation Register.

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