

THE PANDEMIC INFLUENZA A(H1N1) VACCINE

For pregnant women



I'm pregnant. Is the pandemic influenza A(H1N1) vaccine recommended for me?

Yes, it is strongly recommended that pregnant women get vaccinated. It is important to know that pregnant women who contract influenza A(H1N1) in or after the second trimester (fourth month) of pregnancy are at four to five times greater risk of hospitalization than non-pregnant women. The complications of flu can endanger you and your baby.

I've heard there are two kinds of vaccine against pandemic influenza A(H1N1). What are they?

The main vaccine actually offered in Québec is called Arepanrix. It is made the same way as normal flu vaccines. It also contains a substance called an adjuvant that increases the immune response to the vaccine. Like many medications and other pharmaceutical substances, the adjuvant has not been tested for its effect on pregnant women. As a precaution, the government of Québec has ordered a vaccine without an adjuvant for pregnant women. It will be available in mid-November.

But flu is on the rise in Québec. Do I have to wait until mid-November before protecting myself with the vaccine?

No. The effects of the adjuvant on pregnant women and their fetuses are not known, but this does not mean that they are suspected of being numerous, major, or dangerous. The adjuvant-free vaccine is recommended for pregnant women purely as a precaution. However, the harmful effects of influenza A(H1N1) are real, and waiting for the adjuvant-free vaccine has risks, especially since it takes two weeks after vaccination for full protection. Experts recommend that women who are more than halfway through their pregnancy to be vaccinated as soon as possible, and they can receive the Arepanrix vaccine (with adjuvant). This recommendation also applies to women who have chronic medical conditions and are in the first half of pregnancy (less than 20 weeks). Healthy women at the start of pregnancy are encouraged to discuss vaccination and influenza with the health-care professional monitoring their pregnancies. Then, they will be able to decide whether or not to wait for the vaccine without adjuvant.

Does the pandemic influenza A(H1N1) vaccine carry any particular risks for pregnant women or fetuses?

No. The vaccine, with or without adjuvant, cannot cause the flu, because it is made of parts of dead viruses. The possible side effects for pregnant women are the same as for everyone else. The effect on the fetus is not known, but nothing suggests that it could be harmful. However, the risks for pregnant women who contract the disease are well known.

One of the vaccines without adjuvants available in Québec (Panvax™) contains traces of antibiotics. If you have already had an allergic reaction severe enough to warrant immediate medical treatment after taking antibiotics, you must tell the nurse before the vaccine is administered.

What are the expected benefits of vaccination for me and my baby?

The most important benefit is protection against the disease and its complications. Also, a baby born to a woman who was vaccinated in her third trimester has a greater chance of being protected from influenza for a few weeks after birth.

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