

## Flu Season

Every year in the United States approximately 5-20% of the population comes down with the flu. Most cases are mild and resolve on their own. However, more than 200,000 people per year require hospitalization and 36,000 die due to flu-related complications. Certain groups of people are more susceptible to complications from the flu, including children under 5 years old, adults older than 65, people with certain chronic medical conditions (including asthma and diabetes), and pregnant women.

Pregnant women are believed to be at increased risk due to the natural suppression of the immune system which occurs in pregnancy, as well as decreased lung capacity in the latter part of pregnancy which can lead to more respiratory problems and an increased risk of pneumonia. Increased risks of miscarriage and preterm birth were seen in past flu pandemics, especially in pregnant women who contracted pneumonia. High fever from any cause in the first trimester is associated with birth defects such as spina bifida.

The current recommendation of the Center for Disease Control and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is for all women to receive seasonal flu vaccine. Testing is currently underway for novel H1N1 vaccine to determine the best dose of this vaccine for pregnant women. The vaccine is expected to be available in mid-October.

Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue, muscles aches, and sometimes diarrhea or vomiting. Cold symptoms without a fever are usually not the flu.

The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to receive the flu vaccine. Other preventive measures include frequent hand washing, covering coughs, and having ill people stay home except to seek medical care. If you have had close contact with someone who has suspected or diagnosed novel H1N1 flu you can take medication which will make it less likely that you catch the flu. The two medications that are recommended for prevention/treatment of novel H1N1 flu are Tamiflu and Relenza. Both are pregnancy category C.

If you are breastfeeding and you are exposed to or catch the flu, you should continue breastfeeding. The antibodies which pass to your baby through the breast milk will help him/her to stay healthy. You can continue to breastfeed if you are taking Relenza or Tamiflu.

If you have flu symptoms please call immediately so we can discuss treatment. You should take Tylenol to reduce fever. Tamiflu and Relenza are most effective when started within 48 hours of the onset of flu symptoms.

Symptoms that require emergency attention include difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting, flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

This information is meant to be a brief summary of important flu facts. For more information check out [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) .