

General information

- This year, a new flu called “H1N1 flu” is spreading around the world in what is called a pandemic. This means we expect it will be widespread in the community, no matter where you live or work.
- Health authorities are predicting that 20–40% of the general population will get sick with the H1N1 flu this season. Most people affected will be in their 20’s to 40’s and **most cases will be mild.**
- Pregnant women are no more likely to GET the flu, but they are more likely to have serious complications. This is because of changes in your body and immune system during pregnancy which make it harder for you to fight off the infection.
- **Symptoms of H1N1 influenza include: fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, body aches, diarrhea and vomiting.** Some people may also have headache, runny or stuffy nose, chills and fatigue
- Influenza is caused by a virus and can be transmitted when an infected person coughs or sneezes and the virus enters the nose, eyes, or throat of another person. Influenza can also live on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs for 8 hours, and enter the body when someone touches that surface and then touches their mouth or nose.
- Someone with the flu is contagious for 24 hours before they get symptoms and for 7–10 days after. Therefore, it is recommended that you stay away from work for at least 7 days if you become sick.

What about my baby if I get sick with H1N1 influenza after the baby is born?

- Influenza isn’t transmitted to the baby while you are pregnant, even if you become sick. However, if you develop serious complications and require many medications, we can’t predict how this might affect baby.
- If the mother becomes sick, it is currently recommended that she wear a mask when she is in contact with her baby. Wear a mask to protect your family from getting sick.
- Your baby will be watched closely for signs of infection like high breathing rate and fever. It is thought that newborns may have some protection against the H1N1 flu if the mother is vaccinated in pregnancy.
- It is unknown if influenza virus is transmitted through breast milk. However, due to the its well-known protective benefits, it is recommended that the baby still be fed breast milk even if the mother is sick and/or taking Tamiflu. A mother who is sick could pump her milk and have another family member feed the baby.



Compiled by Laura Willihnganz, Oct 14, 2009

2009 H1N1 Influenza In Pregnancy & Postpartum

Key points:

- The most important way to prevent catching the flu is hygiene: **WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY**
- Symptoms of H1N1 influenza include: fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, body aches, diarrhea and vomiting.
- If you think you are sick with the flu, call your midwife and speak with her directly about your symptoms. She may recommend that you **DO NOT** attend your scheduled visit so as not to spread the infection to other women or new babies.
- Start treatment **QUICKLY** after you get sick, within 24 to 48 hours.
- The recommendation is for all pregnant women to get a prescription for Tamiflu from their midwife or doctor **BEFORE** they become sick.
- Recommendations for treatment and vaccination may change as we have more information, so stay in touch with your midwife for the latest developments and information specific to your community.

How can I avoid getting the influenza virus?

- It is very difficult to prevent getting exposed to the H1N1 flu virus, but there are steps you can take to reduce your chance of getting sick.
- **The most important thing is hygiene: WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY.** Avoid touching your face, and carry an antiseptic hand cleanser. Cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- If someone in your household is sick with the flu, try to isolate yourself from that person as much as possible, practice very good hand hygiene and use a separate washroom if possible.
- We have removed the toys from our office, as toys can easily spread the virus. Please bring your own toys for your children this season.



What do I do if I think I am sick with influenza?

- **Call your midwife and speak with her directly about your symptoms. She may recommend that you DO NOT attend your scheduled visit so as not to spread the infection to other women or new babies.**
- Your midwife may recommend that you call your family doctor or a walk-in clinic. You may be assessed over the phone or it may be deemed necessary for you to be seen in person by a doctor.
- Tamiflu is an antiviral drug (taken 2 times per day for 5 days) which can reduce the severity of the infection. The side effects for you are minimal (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea) and there are no known side effects for the baby. Right now, there is no resistance of the H1N1 flu to Tamiflu.
- **The current recommendation is for all pregnant women to get a prescription for Tamiflu from their midwife or doctor ahead of time.** Do not fill the prescription! Once a doctor or midwife confirms that you are likely to have H1N1 flu, someone in your family can have this prescription filled quickly.
- Do NOT wait to see how bad your case of the flu is. **Tamiflu is most effective if taken early (with 24 to 48 hours of getting symptoms)** and delaying the start of treatment may put you at higher risk of serious complications.



- If it is thought that you have the H1N1 flu, a sample of the fluids in your mouth and nose may be collected. This test can give you a tentative result in a few hours, but will need to be sent away for a confirmation test, which can take some time to come back. If your flu test comes back negative, you may be told to stop taking your medication.

What about the flu vaccine?

- The H1N1 vaccine is recommended by Health Canada for all pregnant women this season, regardless of where you work or how many weeks into the pregnancy you are. Health Canada currently recommends getting the regular seasonal flu shot as well, though this is under review.
- The vaccine is scheduled to be available in November 2009. Pregnant women will receive a special version. The seasonal flu shot will be available in early 2010.
- Studies are just coming out about the safety and effectiveness of the H1N1 vaccine. At this time, we speculate that it is safe for pregnancy women, but we don't know yet how effective it is.
- If you become sick after getting the vaccine, call your doctor. You may be given Tamiflu to treat the illness.

For more information/updates:

- BC Ministry of Health Services:
www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1/index.html
- Public Health Agency of Canada:
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1