

Pregnancy and 'swine flu'

Based on evidence from overseas, clinicians consider pregnant women in their second or third trimester to be at increased risk of complications if they catch the illness. This fact sheet will answer some of the questions you may have about 'swine flu' and pregnancy and give you information on how best to protect your self and your baby.

Does 'swine flu' pose special risks for pregnant women?

During pregnancy your immunity to infection is reduced and this may put you at an increased risk of catching 'swine flu' or seasonal flu. You may also have an increased risk of complications from any type of flu, especially in the second and third trimester. While the flu viruses (seasonal or swine flu) do not cross the placenta and infect your baby while in the uterus, the high fever and any chest complications caused by flu can potentially be harmful to your baby.

What can I do to help protect myself and my unborn baby from flu?

The best way to protect yourself and your unborn baby from seasonal flu is to have a vaccination (which is safe at any stage of pregnancy). You should also make sure you follow good hygiene practices including:

- regular hand washing
- covering coughs and sneezes
- keeping surfaces clean

Further information on good hygiene is available from www.flu.sa.gov.au in a fact sheet called 'Good hygiene tips'.

It is also recommended that you take measures to keep yourself healthy and avoid close contact with anyone who appears to have flu-like symptoms.

Will the symptoms be the same if I am pregnant?

Yes, the symptoms of 'swine flu' will still be similar to those of seasonal flu which include fever and cough or sore throat. You may also have a headache, tiredness, body aches and in some instances, diarrhoea and vomiting.

What should I do if I start to get a flu-like illness?

If you start to feel ill during pregnancy you should speak to your doctor immediately or go to your nearest hospital with an Emergency Department.

For advice over the phone you can call the Influenza Hotline on 180 2007.

If I am diagnosed with 'swine flu', can I take antiviral medications?

Not everyone who gets 'swine flu' will need to take antiviral medication. Your doctor will decide whether you need to take them as there are a number of factors which need to be considered. There is currently no evidence that the antiviral medications being used in Australia to treat 'swine flu' are associated with adverse effects in pregnancy.

Any risks associated with taking antiviral medications are much smaller than those posed by infection with swine or seasonal flu. If you are given antiviral medication and start to experience side effects, you should contact your doctor immediately.

Is there any risk to my baby if I am breastfeeding?

Women who are breastfeeding can continue to do so while taking antiviral medication. The antiviral medication may be excreted into breast milk but in very small and insignificant amounts and this has not been associated with adverse effects in babies.

Will pregnant women get preference when a vaccine becomes available?

When a vaccine becomes available it will be distributed according to national guidelines. Vulnerable groups such as pregnant women will be a priority.

For further information, ring the Influenza Hotline on 180 2007 or visit www.flu.sa.gov.au.