



## Influenza vaccination in pregnancy: information for healthcare professionals

Pregnant women and their unborn children are at high risk of morbidity and mortality from influenza infection.<sup>1</sup> Flu can cause maternal intensive care admission, preterm labour, low birth weight and other problems for mother and baby. One in eleven maternal deaths during 2009-12 was caused by influenza.<sup>2</sup> Public Health England and the World Health Organization therefore recommend annual influenza vaccination for all pregnant women.<sup>3,4</sup> However, less than 40% of pregnant women in the UK were vaccinated last year.

### Is the vaccine safe for mother and baby?

- the injectable vaccine is inactivated and does not contain live virus<sup>4</sup>
- the vaccine can be given safely during any trimester<sup>5,6</sup>
- there are no increased risks of maternal complications or poor foetal outcomes associated with inactivated influenza vaccination in pregnancy<sup>6</sup>

### What are the risks of flu immunisation in pregnancy?

- the most common side effect is a sore arm at the site of injection; occasionally mothers may briefly feel systemically unwell due to an immune response
- the vaccine cannot cause influenza infection as it does not contain live virus

### How effective is the vaccine?

- flu vaccination reduces the risk of prematurity and the risk of low birth weight<sup>5,6</sup>
- the vaccine provides passive immunity to the foetus, which can protect the infant for up to 6 months following delivery<sup>7</sup>
- the vaccine reduces adverse maternal outcomes attributed to influenza infection<sup>6</sup>

### What can I do as a healthcare professional?

- encourage mothers to understand the risks of influenza and benefits of vaccination; patient information leaflets are available to support these messages<sup>8</sup>
- encourage pregnant women to receive the vaccine and be aware of vaccination arrangements in your local area

## References

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