

The Case for Flu Vaccination in Pregnancy

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Influenza Vaccination achieved large scale availability in the United States in 1945 after having been initiated in the 1930's [1] and it has been established by the CDC that influenza vaccination does reduce influenza related sickness, medical visits, hospitalizations and deaths [2] even though their effectiveness varies from year to year.

Various vaccines have been recommended for women even while pregnant among which is the seasonal Flu vaccination, a vaccine that protects against infection by influenza viruses [3]. It's available in two forms, the inactive and weakened viral forms but the inactive form given in the form of shots or intramuscular injections is the one recommended during pregnancy. It induces protection of both mother and child from the effects of an influenza infection via an immune response to the antigens present on the inactivated virus thereby increasing the chances of a successful full term pregnancy [4].

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend yearly vaccination for high risk groups, among which are pregnant women and for nearly all people over six months of age [5,6]. It's of note that pregnant women do account for the WHO highest priority group [7].

The influenza vaccines are generally safe and listed among the WHO's List of Essential Medicines [8] but caution should be taken as regards those with severe allergies to eggs or prior versions of the vaccine. It's currently the best way to protect the populace from the flu thereby preventing its spread and the need to get health care workers vaccinated cannot be overemphasized but it takes about two weeks after vaccination to form protective antibodies [9].

Side effects are usually mild when compared to the severe effects of the annual influenza epidemic such as death and can range from runny nose and sore throat to rare allergic reaction. Egg allergy cases are now being circumvented by growing the vaccine in insect cells rather than in eggs [10].

Based on the results of multiple studies proving the safety of the Flu Vaccine in pregnancy, with little to no risks to the baby or mother, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the CDC do advocate the reception of the vaccination throughout pregnancy. In the absence of any major contraindications, Seasonal Flu Vaccine shots should be positively considered in pregnancy.

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