



Pregnancy and H1N1 Flu Virus

As an expectant mother, it's natural to be concerned about how the flu pandemic might affect your pregnancy and your unborn child. The Public Health Agency of Canada wants to provide pregnant women, their families and communities with the information they need to make decisions that will help protect the health of both mother and child.

Pregnant women are not more likely to get the flu, but if they do catch the H1N1 flu virus, they are more likely to suffer complications, like pneumonia and severe respiratory distress, which can put both mother and baby's health at risk. Severe complications from the flu could lead to early delivery or miscarriage.

This is why it's important for mothers-to-be to take the following steps to help protect their health:

Practice basic infection control

PHAC advises all Canadians to:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer (i.e. an alcohol-based hand-rub);
- Cough and sneeze in your arm or sleeve, not your hand;
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected;
- Keep doing what you normally do, but stay home if sick;
- Seek medical care if symptoms worsen; and
- Check the www.fightflu.ca for more information.

It's important for pregnant women and the people around them to follow these guidelines to help reduce the risk of H1N1 exposure, which decreases the chance that moms-to-be will pick up the virus.

Consider avoiding crowds

It's important that we continue to go about our daily lives during the H1N1 flu pandemic. PHAC recommends that pregnant women continue normal activities like going to work, community events or worship services. Caution should be taken; however, when entering situations where there are many people in close quarters with little control over personal contact.

It's recommended that pregnant women be even more vigilant with handwashing and carrying a hand sanitizer, as well as other infection control measures. This will help to reduce the risk that pregnant women will pick up the virus in these types of settings.

Know what to look for

Symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus may include but are not limited to: rapid onset of fever, cough, sore throat, wheezing, and fatigue. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. Fever may not be prominent.



Talk to a medical professional if you have flu-like symptoms, and seek care if symptoms worsen

As stated, pregnant women are not more likely to get the flu, but they are more likely to suffer complications that could put their health and the health of their babies at risk if they get the virus. The risk of complications is greater in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of complications, so it's important that pregnant women speak to a medical professional if they develop flu symptoms, and seek medical care if the symptoms worsen.

The H1N1 flu virus can be treated with drugs called antivirals. Canada has enough doses of two kinds of antivirals, Tamiflu and Relenza, for Canadians who need them. Both Relenza and Tamiflu can be used for the treatment of influenza in pregnant women. Recent scientific evidence suggests Tamiflu may be more effective.

Your medical professional will decide if antivirals are necessary for you, but in order to be effective, they must be administered within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms, so it's important to contact a health professional as soon as you start to feel sick.