Why get vaccinated during pregnancy?

Getting vaccinated during pregnancy is the first way to start protecting your unborn baby from influenza (flu) and pertussis (whooping cough). While they cannot get sick with flu or whooping cough while in your womb, they can be negatively affected if you get sick.

It is important to know that by getting the flu and whooping cough shots during pregnancy, you protect yourself and your baby both before and after birth.

Flu is a concern every year, and pregnant women are at higher risk for complications from the flu than when they are not pregnant. If you catch the flu when you are pregnant, you are more likely to have trouble breathing and the illness can be worse than usual.

Whooping cough, or pertussis, is a growing concern for pregnant women and newborns. Outbreaks of whooping cough are becoming more common in the United States in part because people are not getting vaccinated. Babies get the sickest from whooping cough because their airways are so small that mucus can easily block their ability to breathe.

What is in the shots?

**Flu shot:** The seasonal flu shot that pregnant women receive contains killed parts of the influenza virus that have been purified. These particles are what your body’s immune system uses to make the antibodies needed to protect you and your baby from getting the flu.

**Whooping cough shot (Tdap):** The shot which protects you against whooping cough is called the Tdap shot. This shot also provides protection against tetanus and diphtheria, two other harmful diseases caused by bacteria. The Tdap shot contains purified components from all three bacteria, and these components are what your immune system needs to make protective antibodies.

Did you know? By getting vaccinated and preventing yourself from getting the flu, you protect your fetus by lowering her risk of being born prematurely or being too small at birth.

Are the shots safe?

Yes. It is safe to get the flu shot and Tdap shot during pregnancy. Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommend that pregnant women receive these shots during pregnancy. The most common side effects are mild, and include pain, redness or swelling at the site of the shot, mild fever, and tiredness. Hoarseness; sore, red or itchy eyes; and cough can sometimes happen after the flu shot.

Worse side effects like intense pain or serious allergic reactions are very rare.

When should I get the shots?

**Flu shot:** Any time during pregnancy, especially if you are pregnant during the flu season which runs from September – May.

**Whooping cough shot (Tdap):** It is best to get during your second or third trimester of pregnancy. This shot is available year round at most doctors’ offices.

How can I protect my baby?

Getting these shots during pregnancy is the single best way to start protecting your baby as soon as possible, even before it is born. Because babies cannot get their first whooping cough shot until they are two months old, it is important to encourage family members and close friends to get the flu and Tdap shots too. By making sure everyone your newborn comes in contact with has their shots, you create a safe and healthy “cocoon” for her first vulnerable months of life.

What if I have more questions?

Please ask your doctor or nurse today if you have any questions about these shots. They will be happy to answer them or give you more information. You may also visit immunizationforwomen.org to find out more about these recommended vaccines.

Protect yourself. Protect your baby. Get vaccinated during pregnancy!
Protection starts during pregnancy.
Continue protection after birth.

Where can I start learning about vaccines for my baby?

Now is a great time to start learning about the vaccines your new baby will receive after he or she is born. To learn about the vaccines recommended for newborns and babies, here are some useful resources:

- **U.S. Childhood Immunization Schedules**
  http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/

- **Immunization Action Coalition**
  http://www.immunize.org/

- **Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia’s Vaccine Education Center**
  http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/home.html

- **5 Important Reasons To Immunize Your Child**

- **Why Immunize?**
  A link to a CDC webpage about the importance of childhood vaccination:
  http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/why.htm

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