

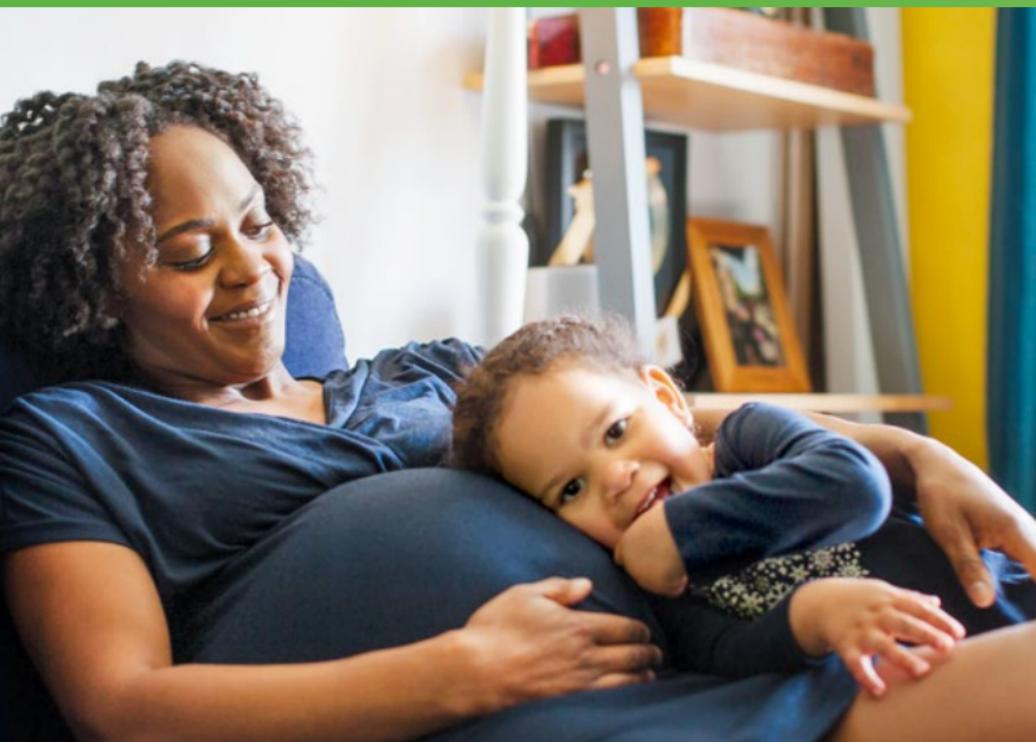


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Wissen, was schützt.

Flu Vaccination

Vaccination during pregnancy protects
both the mother and unborn child.





Staying healthy during pregnancy

During pregnancy, the well-being and health of the mother and unborn child come first.

A flu infection (influenza) during pregnancy can seriously endanger the health of the mother and child. As the pregnancy progresses, the risk of a severe case increases. Complications that must be treated in hospital, such as pneumonia, are possible. In addition, having the flu during pregnancy increases the risk of delayed growth and miscarriage or premature birth.

Unnecessary risk to mother and baby

In order to minimise the risk of serious illness with flu, the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) recommends that all pregnant women get vaccinated against seasonal flu from the second trimester of pregnancy onwards. Pregnant women with chronic underlying conditions such as asthma, diabetes or high blood pressure should be given the vaccination as early as the first trimester. This vaccination

has been demonstrated to provide effective protection for mother and baby.

Seasonal flu: what is it?

Proper flu (seasonal influenza) is a highly infectious disease. In our part of the world, flu waves are a frequent occurrence, especially between January and March. The chances of getting infected and falling ill at that time of year are particularly high.

Influenza viruses are transmitted by tiny droplets, for example when people speak or cough, as well as by hands or touching contaminated surfaces. The viruses attack and damage the mucous membranes of the upper respiratory tract. This not only causes the typical symptoms but also makes the body more susceptible to certain bacterial pathogens. This can lead to a simultaneous infection with other pathogens.

Typical symptoms of flu include:

- sudden onset of illness with fever (≥ 38.5 °C)
- dry, tickly cough
- headache, sore throat, aches and pains in muscles and limbs
- fatigue and sometimes nausea/vomiting
- sweats

These typical symptoms occur in about one third of cases.

Flu can even cause serious complications, such as pneumonia or myocarditis.

Common colds, also called 'flu infections', are caused by a variety of other viruses but are usually milder and disappear after a few days.

**GOOD TO
KNOW**

The flu vaccine only protects against influenza viruses and not generally against other colds.

Why is the flu dangerous during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, the immune system is less active. This is a natural defence mechanism for the unborn child – as it prevents it from being attacked as a foreign body by the pregnant mother's immune system. It also means, however, that women are more susceptible to infection.

In addition, respiration and circulation change during pregnancy, increasing the risk of a serious bout of flu.



Limited treatment options during pregnancy

It is important to think carefully before taking any medication during pregnancy. Baby's healthy development and mother's safety are paramount after all. The same goes for administering antiviral medication, which will only be done during pregnancy on a case-by-case basis after thorough assessment.

Antibiotics are ineffective in combatting a viral infection, such as the flu because they are only suitable for treating bacterial infections. For this reason, antibiotics are used at most for the simultaneous onset of complications caused by bacteria.

That is why prevention through vaccination is better than treatment.



How can I protect myself?

The best protection against a flu infection is having the vaccination in time – preferably from October to mid-December – before the beginning of the flu season. It helps the body to produce antibodies against flu viruses.

**VACCINATION
RECOMMENDED**

The Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) recommends that all healthy pregnant women get vaccinated against flu from the second trimester of pregnancy onwards. Pregnant women with chronic underlying conditions such as asthma, diabetes or high blood pressure should be given the vaccination as early as the first trimester.

Pregnant women who have been inadequately protected against the coronavirus so far are recommended to get the coronavirus vaccination from the second trimester onwards. The flu and Covid-19 vaccinations can be given at the same appointment.

A one-off vaccination against whooping cough (pertussis) is also recommended in the last trimester of every pregnancy (from week 28 onwards). However, a vaccination against whooping cough is not available separately. It is given in the form of a combined vaccine against tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough and sometimes also against polio.

Annual reformulation of vaccines

Since the flu virus changes every year, the vaccines must be adjusted each year to provide the best possible protection.



The seasonal vaccines will protect against the virus variants that are anticipated in the upcoming flu season. STIKO recommends getting the flu jab from October to mid-December.

Although the efficacy of flu vaccines cannot be predicted accurately, many infections can be prevented by vaccination. In some cases, where pregnant women fell ill with flu despite vaccination, the infection was milder.

Good tolerability for the mother and child

The 'inactivated' flu vaccines for adults do not contain any live pathogens capable of replication but instead contain certain parts which are required to provoke an immune response. Making it impossible for mother and baby to become infected with flu through the vaccine. These so-called non-live vaccines – which are also used for tetanus and whooping cough – are safe and effective for mother and baby. Conversely, live vaccines – such as those used for measles, mumps and rubella – ought to be given prior to a potential pregnancy.



**GOOD TO
KNOW**

The flu jab can be administered as part of standard antenatal care in a gynaecological practice. The jab is also offered by GP surgeries or internal medicine practices, some public health offices, pharmacists or employers.

Health insurers cover the costs of the recommended vaccine. The flu jab can be administered at the same time as the coronavirus jab. Vaccine reactions are slightly more common where the two jabs are given at the same time rather than at separate times.

Safety of the vaccine confirmed

The safety of the vaccination for both pregnant women and unborn babies has been confirmed in various studies. No increase in the incidence of serious vaccine reactions could be detected. Nor was there a rise in the incidence of premature birth or Caesarean sections or any differences in the postnatal health condition of the babies.

When should you not get vaccinated?

Vaccines should not be given during a febrile illness (38.5°C) or severe acute infection. However, the vaccine should be delivered as soon as possible afterwards.

In the event of a medically diagnosed severe allergy to chicken protein, which is very rare, the vaccination should only be given in an environment in which clinical monitoring and treatment is possible after vaccination. Please speak to your doctor about this.

Risks: possible side effects

Possible side effects of the flu vaccination commonly include reddening and soreness at the site of the injection. Fever, nausea or muscle aches are rarer. These symptoms are generally harmless and indicate that the immune system is being activated. Serious side effects, such as a rash or immediate allergic reaction, only occur in extremely rare cases.

One thing is sure: The risks associated with vaccination are significantly lower than the risk of contracting a serious bout of influenza!



Twice the benefit

Vaccinating pregnant women also protects the baby after birth. Vaccination also protects children after birth because antibodies are passed to the child through the placenta and this is known as 'passive immunity'. This is vital protection as both flu and whooping cough have been frequently linked to complications in children during the first year of life.

Babies cannot be vaccinated against flu until after their sixth month. Primary immunisation against whooping cough is started from the age of two months, with a long-lasting vaccination not being possible until at least the fifth month.



GOOD TO KNOW

Those close to newborns should consider getting a flu jab, as it will protect not just them but also the baby. STIKO also recommends that people caring for newborns and people in the same household as newborns should get an up-to-date vaccination against whooping cough.

Additional protection: good hygiene practice

Simple hygiene measures can reduce the risk of infection further:

- ▶ Wash your hands with soap several times a day (e.g. when you come in from being outdoors, after going to the toilet and prior to preparing meals and eating).
- ▶ Refrain from coughing and sneezing into your hand, instead doing so into the crook of your arm or into a tissue.
- ▶ Use paper tissues and dispose of these after a single use.
- ▶ Those infected with flu should maintain a distance of at least two metres from at-risk people.



Further information

on vaccinations can be found at:

- www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung
- www.infektionsschutz.de
- www.rki.de/influenza-impfung

on children's health at:

- www.kindergesundheit-info.de

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Is a flu jab
recommended
for me?

You can check here:

