

PANDEMIC H1N1 FLU FAQs FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

I'm pregnant – should I be concerned?

Pregnant women are not more likely to get pandemic H1N1, but if they do catch the virus, they may be more likely to have severe illness that may affect their pregnancy. While pregnant women are considered more likely to develop severe illness, the vast majority of pregnant women did not require medical or hospital care during the first wave of the pandemic in Manitoba.

Any infectious illness can put a mother and unborn baby's health at risk. Generally, the risk of complications from pandemic H1N1, like pneumonia and severe respiratory distress, is greater in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Complications from H1N1 flu in the mother may lead to harmful effects on the fetus.

How can I prevent getting sick?

All Manitobans, including pregnant women, should take the same basic precautions, including:

- Cover your cough by coughing into your elbow or sleeve or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Place the tissue in the garbage.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. When soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizer may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Limit touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Maintain your health by taking care of yourself and those in your care including eating a healthy balanced diet, avoiding cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, being active and getting enough rest and sleep.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Symptoms may include but are not limited to: sudden onset of fever, cough, muscle and joint aches and fatigue. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur and fever may not always be prominent.

When should I go to my doctor?

Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of severe illness, so pregnant women should visit a health care provider if they develop flu-like symptoms, as soon as they can.

Pregnant women who have symptoms of a more severe illness such as shortness of breath, dehydration or severe weakness, or whose other symptoms get worse, should seek immediate medical care. Pregnant women should also see their health care provider if they do not get better as they normally would, even if they've already seen them about their illness.

If someone at home is sick, should I wear a mask?

It is not recommended that healthy people wear masks as they go about their daily routines. This is because wearing masks in non-health care settings would not be expected to prevent the spread of influenza in most settings and circumstances. Improper use may actually increase the risk of infection. If someone in your home has a flu-like illness, you have likely been exposed to the ill person, or the same source as the ill person, before symptoms appeared.

If someone at work is or has been sick, what should I do?

The likelihood of being exposed to pandemic H1N1 at work is generally the same as it would be in any other public setting or at home. While at work pregnant women should wash their hands regularly and follow the same basic precautions they would in any other setting. Masks are not recommended at work even if colleagues or clients have been ill. If someone in your workplace is showing flu-like symptoms, they should stay home until they feel better.

If you have concerns about your workplace and its pandemic preparedness, speak to your employer, contact Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health, call your local public health office or visit www.manitoba.ca/flu for more information.

Do pregnant women need a different kind of treatment for pandemic H1N1 flu?

You may be prescribed an antiviral to help treat your symptoms. Your health care provider will decide this with you. Antivirals are most effective if given as soon as possible after symptoms start. Antivirals have been licensed by Health Canada to be used during pregnancy.

Will the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine be safe for pregnant women when it's available?

When Health Canada issues a license for any new vaccine they work with the manufacturer to determine if, and for whom it is safe to use. It is likely that the pandemic H1N1 vaccine will be approved for pregnant women.

Should I try to delay getting pregnant because of the risks from H1N1?

Deciding when to become pregnant is a personal decision and you may want to speak with your health care provider. Public health officials have advised Manitobans to continue to go about their daily lives as pandemic H1N1 circulates while taking appropriate precautions.

For more information about H1N1, contact your health care provider, call **Health Links – Info Santé** at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free) or visit www.manitoba.ca/flu.