



News Release

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Influenza Vaccines: Safe and Important During Pregnancy

(Salt Lake City, UT) – This flu season, new mothers and mothers-to-be should be among those who are first in line for influenza vaccine. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) encourages women who are pregnant or breastfeeding and anyone caring for infants under six months of age to get both the H1N1 and seasonal influenza vaccines.

Pregnant women in Utah were at increased risk of medical problems from H1N1 infection during the outbreak last spring and summer. Twenty-one pregnant women were hospitalized with H1N1 infection, representing 7% of all hospitalizations in Utah. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that, nationally, previously healthy mothers-to-be made up 13 percent of all H1N1 deaths. That increased risk is of great concern to health experts in Utah.

“The hormonal changes that occur in pregnancy increase stress on the heart and lungs, speeding up the heart rate, lowering lung capacity, and potentially creating serious illness for pregnant women who get influenza and their unborn children,” said Dr. Michael Varner of the University of Utah Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Health officials around the state want women to be confident that the vaccines are safe, and necessary, in pregnancy.

“Both the H1N1 and seasonal influenza vaccines are produced using standard methods that have been unchanged for many years,” said Dr. David Sundwall, Executive Director, UDOH. “And in all those years, no influenza vaccine has ever been known to increase the risk of birth defects or any other pregnancy problem,” he added.

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Dr. Al Romeo, counselor with the UDOH Pregnancy Risk Line, says experts across the country agree that the benefits of getting vaccinated against influenza and keeping pregnant women healthy outweigh any risk to a developing fetus. “In fact, researchers have looked at previous influenza outbreaks and documented a higher rate of miscarriages and premature births during influenza pandemics,” said Romeo.

Each year, new influenza strains are identified and added to the seasonal influenza vaccine “mix” for the following year. Because the H1N1 virus appeared too late to be added to the mix, adults will need two vaccines this year; the seasonal and H1N1.

Two types of vaccines are available for seasonal and H1N1 influenza infection; injectable and nasal spray. The injectable vaccine is made from dead influenza virus and is recommended for pregnant women, while the nasal spray form contains live virus and is not approved for use in pregnant women.

In addition to getting vaccinated, take these steps to reduce exposure to influenza:

- Wash hands frequently,
- Cover mouth while coughing and sneezing,
- Limit contact with others in the household who may be ill, and
- Stay home when ill (except when seeking medical care).

To find out where to get either an H1N1 or seasonal influenza vaccine, visit www.immunize-utah.org or call 2-1-1.

For answers to questions about the safety of vaccines and medications in pregnancy and breastfeeding, call the Pregnancy Risk Line 1-800-822-2229.

See the *H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Vaccine: What Every Pregnant Woman Must Know* brochure at http://www.health.utah.gov/rhp/pdf/H1N1_Vaccine.pdf.

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