



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

*PO Box 47890 | Olympia, Washington 98504-7890  
Tel: 360-236-4030 | 711 Washington Relay Service*

October 26, 2020

Dear Colleague:

Given the impact of co-circulating influenza virus and the COVID-19 pandemic, we are asking for your help to support Washington residents and the community through vaccinations. We encourage you to strongly recommend, offer, and administer flu vaccine for all your pregnant patients.

Flu vaccination is recommended for pregnant and postpartum women by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Nurse Midwives, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Studies consistently show that **pregnant women are more likely to be vaccinated against influenza when their healthcare provider provides a recommendation and offers the flu shot.** As their healthcare provider, your patients trust your recommendation over any other source.

Please consider the following messages when talking with your pregnant and postpartum patients about the importance of flu vaccination as well as prompt treatment for flu.

### **Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant and postpartum women.**

- Getting the flu during pregnancy may cause serious problems for both mother and baby, including premature labor and delivery, unplanned hospitalization, and possibly death.

*The CDC recently published a six-year [coauthored study](#) concluding that getting a flu shot reduces a pregnant woman's risk of being hospitalized for flu by an average of 40 percent.*

### **Getting vaccinated is the best protection.**

- Women can get the flu shot any time during pregnancy or after birth, even if they are breastfeeding.
- The flu shot has been safely given to millions of pregnant women for many years. The nasal spray flu vaccine is not recommended and should not be given to pregnant women because it contains live virus.
- Getting a flu shot during pregnancy extends protection to babies for up to six months after birth - the time when babies cannot get vaccinated against flu and are particularly vulnerable.
- Recommend flu vaccination for the household and caregivers of pregnant and postpartum women. This will help protect not only the pregnant mother but also the new infant once he or she is born.

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- Recommend and offer the Tdap vaccine to protect against whooping cough. The CDC recommends administering Tdap as early as possible during the third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect newborns. Tdap can be administered at the same time as the flu vaccine if needed.

*A recent CDC [study](#) published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* reported that vaccination with Tdap during the third trimester of pregnancy prevented more than three out of four (78 percent) cases of whooping cough in babies younger than two months.*

*A [study published in the October 11, 2019 MMWR](#) reports that from the years 2010-2018 one third of pregnant women who reported vaccination offers or referrals from a health care provider chose to remain unvaccinated.*

#### **Antiviral medication can treat the flu.**

- Prompt treatment with [antiviral medication](#) is important. If a pregnant or postpartum woman gets sick with flu-like symptoms, she should call her doctor right away. Early treatment helps lessen symptoms and shortens the time she is sick by one to two days.

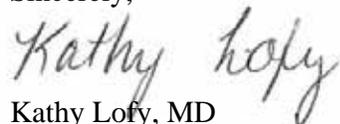
**Antiviral treatment can, and should, be started even before influenza is confirmed.**

The Department of Health has a bilingual [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\) about Flu Vaccine & Pregnancy page](#) that addresses common concerns, which also includes printable flu and pregnancy flyers with additional resources for information and support.

For additional flu information, visit the Department of Health's [Knock Out Flu](#) or [CDC](#) websites. A newly published toolkit to assist you in promoting flu vaccine to your patients is available at [toolkits.knockoutflu.org](http://toolkits.knockoutflu.org).

Thank you for helping pregnant and postpartum women make an informed decision about getting this essential vaccine this year, and every year.

Sincerely,



Kathy Lofy, MD  
State Health Officer