

News Release

For immediate release

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Pregnant women urged to protect themselves with flu jab

Mums-to-be in Swindon are being urged to get the flu vaccine to protect themselves and their babies against serious complications.

The flu jab is safe for mothers-to-be and their unborn babies at every stage of pregnancy. In addition it may offer the baby protection for the first four to six months of its life.

NHS Swindon Public Health consultant, Dr Ayoola Oyinloye said: "In pregnancy, the immune system is naturally suppressed, which raises the risk of complications such as pneumonia, which can lead to premature labour or miscarriage.

Well publicised cases of pregnant women in England being affected by the virus demonstrate the importance of being vaccinated, and we are urging anyone who is pregnant or falls into one of the at-risk groups to call their GP and book an appointment today.

This year the free NHS flu jab is being offered to pregnant women as well as over 65s, under 65s with serious long-term health problems and frontline health and social care staff. People who fall into these categories will be contacted by their GP in the next few weeks inviting them to make an appointment.

The best way to avoid flu is to get immunised, but in addition, people can protect themselves and those around them by practising good hand hygiene with the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' technique. This means carrying tissues, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, disposing of the tissue after one use, and cleaning hands as soon as possible with soap and water or an alcohol hand gel.

If you are concerned then I would urge you to speak to your midwife, GP or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

Press enquiries:

For more information or to arrange interviews please contact Kirsty Brain, Head of Communications on 01793 708761 or Kirsty.brain@swindon-pct.nhs.uk

Notes for editors:

Flu symptoms can hit quite suddenly and severely. They usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles and are often accompanied by a cough and sore throat. Because flu is caused by a virus and not bacteria, antibiotics won't treat it.

Anyone can get flu, but it can be more serious for certain people, such as:

- people aged 65 or over
- people who have a serious medical condition
- pregnant women

The best time of the year to get a [flu vaccination](#) is now - the autumn.

Even if someone has had a flu jab previously, it is important that as long as they are in this years 'at risk group' they need another one to keep immunity up to date. It is free and effective against the latest flu virus strains. The flu jab may only protect someone for a year, because the viruses that cause flu are always changing.

See your GP about the flu jab if you're 65 or over, or if you have any of the following problems (however old you are):

- a serious heart complaint
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- serious kidney disease
- [diabetes](#)
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or [cancer](#) treatment
- if you have a problem with your spleen or you have had your spleen removed
- if you have ever had a [stroke](#)

Your GP may advise you to have a flu jab if you have serious liver disease, [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#) or some other diseases of the nervous system.

If you think you may need a flu vaccination, check with your GP, practice nurse or your local pharmacist. If a nurse visits you regularly, ask about getting your flu vaccination. Most GP surgeries arrange vaccination sessions in the autumn.

How effective is it?

No vaccine is 100% effective, however, people who have had the flu jab are far less likely to get flu. If you do get flu despite having the jab, it will probably be milder than if you haven't been vaccinated.

Will I get flu?

The flu jab doesn't cause flu as it doesn't contain live viruses. However, you may experience side effects after having the jab, such as a temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards. Your arm may feel sore at the site where you were injected. More severe reactions are rare.

The flu vaccine only protects against flu, but not other illnesses caused by other viruses, such as the [common cold](#).