

## **SWINE FLU INFORMATION**

[www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)

**0800 1 513 513**

# **SWINE FLU AND PREGNANCY**

## **How to protect yourself and your baby**

**This leaflet gives information about:**

- the swine flu vaccination that you can have during pregnancy to help protect you and your baby
- precautions you can take to reduce your risk of infection
- treatments that are available if you do become ill.

## **Flu. Protect yourself and others.**

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# What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease caused by a new strain of flu virus. The seasonal flu vaccines that are already available don't protect against swine flu, so a new flu vaccine has been developed.

## How serious is swine flu?

For most people, swine flu is mild. It comes on quickly and generally lasts for around a week. It causes fever, tiredness, a cough and a sore throat. Other symptoms can include a headache, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, a runny nose, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Some people are more likely to become seriously ill with swine flu, including pregnant women. This is why it is important to have the vaccine.

## Why are pregnant women being offered the vaccination first?

Pregnant women are considerably more likely to develop serious complications from swine flu. The World Health Organization states that up to 10% of all hospitalised patients with swine flu are women who are more than three months pregnant.

The risk of complications (including miscarriage and premature labour) is highest during the later stages of pregnancy. Having the swine flu vaccine now could help you avoid catching swine flu and protect your baby.

**Pregnant women are considerably more likely to develop serious complications and be hospitalised with swine flu.**

## About the swine flu vaccine

Vaccines have been developed to protect against the virus that causes swine flu. There are two different brands of vaccine: Pandemrix and Celvapan. Most people given the Pandemrix vaccine will only need one dose. People who have the Celvapan vaccine will need two doses, at least three weeks apart.

### Is it the same as the seasonal flu vaccination?

No. The swine flu vaccine is different from the seasonal flu vaccination that's offered every year. The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu. If you are usually advised by your GP to have the seasonal flu vaccination, you should have it as usual.

**If you usually have the seasonal flu vaccine, you should continue to have this as normal.**

### Can the swine flu vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes, the swine flu vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the seasonal flu vaccine. But if two vaccinations are being administered on the same day, they should be given in different arms.

### There are two vaccines – which one will I be given?

We advise the use of Pandemrix for pregnant women, as only one dose is required. This means that you will be protected more quickly from the risk of flu than if you receive Celvapan, which requires two doses, at least three weeks apart.

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# Is the vaccine safe for me and my baby?

Pandemrix and Celvapan are both licensed for use for pregnant women. Similar vaccines containing another flu virus strain (H5N1) have been clinically tested in trials involving over 5,000 people.

When it licensed the vaccines, the European Commission carefully considered all the evidence and recommended them for use. Women who are known to have become pregnant shortly after receiving Pandemrix have gone on to have normal pregnancies.

## What is an adjuvanted vaccine?

An adjuvant is added to vaccines so that a lower dose of the vaccine is needed to produce the same level of protection. The adjuvant enhances the immune response seen following vaccination.

The adjuvant used in Pandemrix includes squalene, which is extracted from fish oil and occurs naturally in plants, animals and humans. There is also a small amount of vitamin E (which we all have in our food and in our bodies) and polysorbate 80 (which is found in food and other medicines).

## What is thiomersal?

Pandemrix contains thiomersal, which is a preservative that contains a very small amount of mercury.

There is no evidence of risk from thiomersal-containing vaccines for pregnant women and their babies.

## Can the swine flu vaccine cause flu?

No. The flu vaccine cannot give you flu as it does not contain a live virus. Some people may experience mild flu-like symptoms (like fever, headache and muscle aches) for up to 48 hours after immunisation as their immune system responds to the vaccine, but this is not flu.

**The vaccine is not live and cannot cause swine flu.**

### Are there any other side effects?

All vaccinations can produce side effects such as redness, soreness and swelling at the site of the injection. The vast majority of these side effects are not serious.

If you think that you or someone you know has experienced a more serious side effect to Pandemrix or Celvapan, please speak to your GP or midwife or report it to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency at [www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu).

### I've already had swine flu. Do I still need the vaccine?

Most people cannot be certain they have had swine flu unless it was confirmed by laboratory tests. There are several viruses which can cause flu-like symptoms and so, to be sure that we reduce the risk of infection, we are offering vaccination to all people in the priority groups. It is safe to be vaccinated even if you have already had swine flu and taken antivirals.

### Who can't have the swine flu vaccine?

There are very few people who cannot have the swine flu vaccine. The vaccines should not be given to anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or to any component of the vaccine. If you are worried that this may apply to you, talk to your GP or midwife.

### What about people with egg allergies?

The Pandemrix vaccine is prepared in hens' eggs in the same way that seasonal flu vaccines are. It should not be given to people who have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (experiencing shock or difficulty breathing) after being exposed to egg products. The Celvapan vaccine is not prepared using eggs, so you should have this vaccine if you have a severe allergy to eggs.

### Who can I talk to if I'm concerned?

Contact your GP, practice nurse or midwife if you have any concerns.

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# What can I do to protect myself and others from swine flu?

The swine flu virus can be transmitted through the droplets that come out of an infected person's nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze.

The most effective way of reducing transmission is by following simple respiratory and hand hygiene. You can reduce the risk of catching or spreading swine flu by doing the following:

- **Catch it** – always covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- **Bin it** – throwing away dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- **Kill it** – maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and warm water or using a sanitiser gel.

Cleaning hard surfaces that are frequently touched (such as door handles) using a normal cleaning product will also help reduce the spread of infection.

## Can I continue with my normal activities?

Yes. Carry on doing the things you normally do, such as going to work, travelling on public transport and attending family gatherings. However, try to avoid visiting family or friends who are suffering flu-like symptoms.

If you know of a large number of people falling ill in your neighbourhood, you may prefer to avoid crowded places where possible.

## Am I at risk at work?

Legally, employers must assess the risks to their employees from their job, including work risks which may affect expectant mothers.

You should therefore let your employer know, in writing if possible, about your pregnancy as soon as you can. This will allow you both to look at the possible risks of your job and to take any necessary action to protect the health and safety of both you and your baby.

## **What should I do if I or people close to me catch swine flu before I have the vaccine?**

If you are pregnant and you think you or people close to you have swine flu, it's important to contact your doctor, who can advise you on what to do next.

If you are diagnosed with swine flu, you may be offered an antiviral medicine.

### **What is the difference between an antiviral and a vaccine?**

A vaccine is given to prevent someone from catching an infection. The body's immune system then makes antibodies which will fight off infection if exposure to the virus occurs.

People who are already ill with swine flu are treated with antivirals. Antivirals may help relieve some of the symptoms of swine flu and reduce the potential for serious complications.

### **Which antiviral will I be given?**

Two antiviral medicines (Relenza and Tamiflu) are recommended for pregnant women who have an uncomplicated illness due to swine flu and who do not have an underlying disease.

Relenza is breathed in using an inhaler and is recommended as the first choice for pregnant women because it easily reaches the throat and lungs, where it is needed. It does not reach significant levels in the blood or placenta, and should not affect your pregnancy or your growing baby.



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Tamiflu should be offered to you instead of Relenza if you:

- have a condition such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- have difficulty using an inhaler, or
- develop a severe or complicated disease due to flu (you will probably be treated in hospital).

If you are prescribed antiviral medication, it's important to start taking it as soon as possible.

## What should I do now?

You should be invited to go to a vaccination clinic or to make an appointment at your GP surgery. Not everyone in the country will get their vaccine at exactly the same time, so don't worry if you don't hear from your GP surgery straightaway.

However, if after a few weeks you still haven't heard anything, get in touch with your GP surgery.

### If you are pregnant and think you have swine flu

#### In England

Contact your GP

People who are not in higher risk groups should visit

[www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)

or call the National Pandemic Flu Service:

**0800 1 513 100**

Textphone: **0800 1 513 200**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

#### In Scotland

Contact your GP or NHS24: **08454 24 24 24**

Textphone: **18001 08454 24 24 24**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

#### In Wales

Contact your GP or call NHS Direct Wales:

**0845 46 47**

Textphone: **0845 606 46 47**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

#### In Northern Ireland

Contact your GP or the Northern Ireland swine flu helpline:

**0800 0514 142**

Textphone: **18001 0800 0514 142**

(for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

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Calling NHS24 should cost no more than the price of a local telephone call from a BT landline. Calls to NHS Direct Wales cost a maximum of 2p per minute from most BT landlines. Calls to all other numbers here are free from landlines. Calls from mobiles and other networks may vary – please check with your provider.

**For more information about swine flu and pregnancy**

Visit [www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)

## Why is getting vaccinated a good idea?

Getting vaccinated against swine flu will help:

- protect you and your baby against swine flu
- protect you against future infection caused by the swine flu virus
- stop the spread of the virus to others around you.

For England and Scotland, extra copies of this leaflet can be ordered from **[www.orderline.dh.gov.uk](http://www.orderline.dh.gov.uk)** quoting:

### **England:**

Swine flu and pregnancy leaflet 299759

### **Scotland:**

Swine flu and pregnancy leaflet 299759/Scotland

Tel: **0300 123 1002**

Fax: **01623 724 524**

Textphone: **0300 123 1003**

(8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

You can order copies of this leaflet in Braille, large print, Easy Read, audio and British Sign Language (BSL) formats.

In addition, you can download copies of this leaflet in alternative formats and other languages at

**[www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)**