

It makes good sense to stay away from sick people while you're pregnant. Try to avoid people with colds, coughs, sore throats, and flu.

If you should get sick during your pregnancy, or have symptoms that make you think you're getting the flu, make an appointment to be checked by your doctor.

And remember—don't take any medicine on your own. Minor colds and other mild upsets are best taken care of by getting lots of rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and using a humidifier.

Let your doctor know if you have been exposed to any serious illness, including sexually transmitted diseases.

Flu

Flu can be a serious illness for babies. Because infants under 6 months are too young to get a flu shot, it's up to you to protect your baby.

If your baby will be born during flu season – from October to April – it's important that you and everyone who will live with or take care of your baby get a flu shot. This includes brothers and sisters, grandparents, and caregivers.

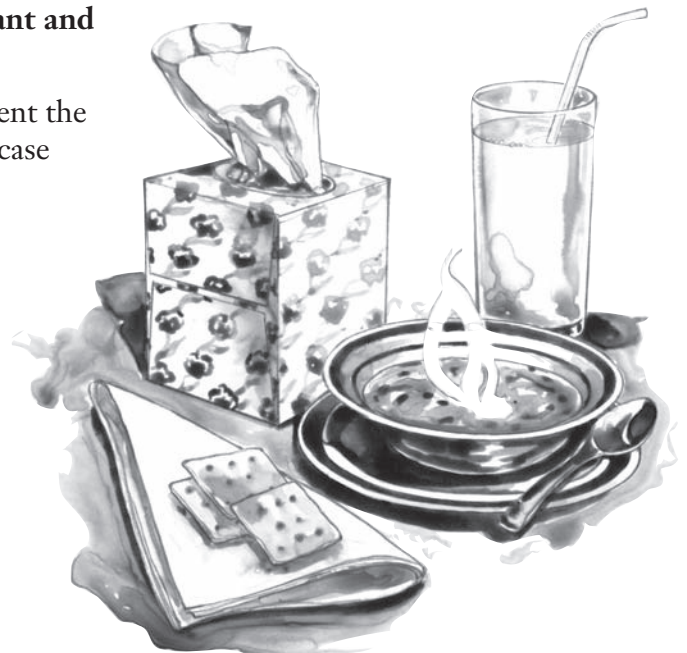
In Nova Scotia, flu shots are free.

The flu is an infection caused by a virus. The flu affects your respiratory system—that is, your nose, throat and lungs. You may also get a fever, feel tired, and have general aches and pains. The medical term for the flu is “influenza.”

The flu shot contains influenza vaccine that protects you from getting the flu. The vaccine in the shot does **NOT** contain living virus. **Flu shots are SAFE for pregnant and breastfeeding women.**

Flu shots work very well. Most of the time they prevent the flu. If you do get the flu, you will get a much milder case if you've had a flu shot.

A flu shot takes about two weeks to start to work, and it will protect you for about six months. You can get a flu shot from your family doctor, Public Health Services, or community clinics. For best results, you should get a flu shot in the fall.



Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a common childhood disease caused by the varicella virus. Chickenpox causes an itchy rash, which looks like small water blisters. Chickenpox can be prevented through immunization with the varicella vaccine

Chickenpox is highly contagious—it is very easy to catch. You can catch chickenpox from someone even before the rash breaks out.

The virus that causes chickenpox is spread in three ways:

- Through the air
- Through direct contact with liquid from a chickenpox blister
- Through direct contact with the saliva of an infected person

While most people who get chickenpox recover with no lasting effects, chickenpox can be very severe or even life-threatening to newborn babies, infants, adults, and those who have a weak immune system.

During pregnancy, chickenpox can be serious for both mother and baby. A pregnant woman who has chickenpox can pass the virus to her unborn baby before birth, causing chickenpox in her newborn baby.

If you have already had chickenpox or been immunized with the varicella vaccine, you likely have protection (immunity) from getting chickenpox and passing it to your baby. If you cannot remember having the disease, discuss it with your doctor.

Contact your doctor immediately if you have been in close contact with someone who has chickenpox and you have not already had chickenpox or been immunized with the varicella vaccine.

Vaccination is **NOT** recommended for pregnant women. You may get the vaccine right after you give birth. It is safe for your baby if you continue breastfeeding after getting the vaccine. You should wait at least one month after being immunized with the varicella vaccine before becoming pregnant.

German measles

German measles are caused by the rubella virus. This disease causes a slight fever, rash, and swelling of the nodes in the neck for about three days. It may result in swelling or aching joints for a week or two, as well as a temporary bleeding disorder called purpura.

If a woman develops German measles during pregnancy, her baby may be born with birth defects. Your doctor will assess your immunity to rubella during your prenatal visits.

German measles can be prevented by the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine (MMR). However, the MMR vaccine is **NOT** recommended during pregnancy. You may get the MMR vaccine right after you give birth.

It is safe for your baby if you continue breastfeeding after getting the vaccine. You should wait at least one month after being immunized with the MMR vaccine before becoming pregnant.

Group B Streptococcus (GBS)

Group B streptococcus (GBS) is a kind of bacteria found in some women's vagina, rectum, or bladder. As many as 40% of women may have GBS bacteria in their body and not know it.

GBS does not usually cause infections in pregnant women, but it can infect a newborn baby during childbirth.

GBS infections in newborns are rare. Only 1-2% of newborns exposed to GBS during birth will become infected, but these babies can become seriously ill.

GBS can cause mild to severe infections in newborn babies. GBS can affect the blood, brain, lungs, and spinal cord. In severe cases it can lead to death.

During pregnancy, you can have a simple, painless test for GBS. In Nova Scotia, we recommend that all pregnant women be tested between their 35th and 37th week of pregnancy. Women with a planned cesarian delivery should still be tested. Your health care provider will take a sample from your vagina and rectum with a special Q-tip.

If your GBS test is positive, you will be given antibiotics when you go into labour.

If you were not tested, or your test result is not back when you go into labour, you may still be given antibiotics during labour. This would happen if:

- You go into labour before 37 weeks.
- Your water breaks 18 hours or more before delivery.

Some women will be treated with antibiotics during labour, even if their GBS test is negative. This would happen if:

- You have had another baby who developed GBS infection.
- You had a urine test during this pregnancy that was positive for GBS bacteria.
- You have a fever during labour

The antibiotics will kill the GBS bacteria quickly and will help prevent GBS infection in your baby.

If you'd like to know more about GBS, talk with your doctor or your local public health nurse.