

Breastfeeding and the Flu – Know the Facts!

Children are at high risk for the flu and flu-related complications. However, the flu vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months of age. Here is some information from Families Fighting Flu and Medela on how you can best protect your little ones from the flu.

Q Can I get vaccinated for the flu while breastfeeding?

A Yes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number one way to protect infants younger than 6 months of age from the flu is for those who come in contact with them, including mothers and all other household members, to get vaccinated. You can breastfeed even if you have just gotten the flu vaccine. Women who are breastfeeding may receive the nasal spray flu vaccine or the flu shot.

If you become pregnant while breastfeeding, vaccination can protect both a pregnant mother and her baby from severe illness that can lead to hospitalization or complications such as premature labor and delivery, or death. In fact, a new study in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology found that babies born to moms who were vaccinated during pregnancy were up to 48 percent less likely to be hospitalized for flu in the early months of life. Flu protection is a critical, life-saving measure that every mother should take seriously each and every year.

Q Does breastfeeding protect my baby from the flu?

A Breast milk is the perfect food for your baby. There are protective antibodies in breast milk that help the baby's developing immune system fight off infection. Babies who are breastfed get sick from infections like the flu less often and less severely than babies who are not breastfed. In addition to getting vaccinated, you can help protect your baby from germs by frequent hand washing.

Q Should I stop breastfeeding if I have been around someone with the flu?

A No. Mothers' milk contains antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with, so breast milk is custom-made to fight diseases babies are exposed to as well. These antibodies play an important role in protecting young babies when their immune systems are still developing.

Q Do I need to stop breastfeeding my baby if I am sick?

A If you are sick, speak with your health care provider about precautions to protect your baby.

Q Is it ok to take medicine to treat or prevent the flu while breastfeeding?

A While most medicines used to treat the flu are safe, you should always talk to your health care provider about medications you are taking to ensure they are safe for breastfeeding.

Q If my baby is sick, is it ok to continue breastfeeding?

A Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breastfeeding. Remember, breast milk is the perfect food for your baby, and breastfed babies get sick from infections like the flu less often and less severely than babies who are not breastfed.

Sick babies need more fluids, and breast milk is better for your baby than any other liquid because it also helps protect your baby's immune system. Talk to your health care provider about the best ways to feed your baby breast milk if sickness is making breastfeeding a challenge.

Flu can be very serious in young babies. If your baby gets sick, call your baby's health care provider right away.

