

Study shows the safety of flu vaccine during pregnancy

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An Australia-wide study published in the international journal *Vaccine* has provided reassuring evidence on the safety of influenza vaccination during pregnancy.

Led by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), the collaborative study involved 7,126 women recruited from Darwin, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth over three consecutive years, to assess the safety of receiving an influenza vaccination during any trimester of pregnancy with respect to preterm births and infant birthweight.

The large national study found 2,429 women had a flu vaccine during their pregnancy, with the majority receiving the vaccination during their second trimester, whilst 4,697 women did not vaccinate against the flu during their pregnancy.

Lead author, Menzies PhD student, Lisa McHugh said the study found women who had an influenza vaccine in pregnancy were not at increased risk of having a preterm or low birthweight baby compared with those who were not vaccinated.

“Our results showed no clinically significant differences in infant birthweight or gestational age at birth of the infant for women who received an influenza vaccination during any trimester of pregnancy compared with unvaccinated mothers,” Ms McHugh said.

The findings support the current recommendation in Australia to vaccinate all women who are pregnant during the influenza season.

“The reason flu vaccination is recommended in pregnancy by the World Health Organization and other expert groups is because pregnant women are at higher risk of severe illness if they do acquire influenza infection when pregnant. This is due to reduced immunity or if the pregnant woman has a co-morbidity or risk factor such as diabetes or a history of respiratory illness like asthma or bronchitis.

“Our study results contribute to the evidence around the safety of receiving an influenza vaccine during any trimester of pregnancy. We hope this provides reassurance to pregnant women and health care providers given that vaccination is the best way to prevent illness and death from influenza infection when it occurs during pregnancy,” Ms McHugh said.

Chief investigator and Chair of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, Menzies’ Professor Ross Andrews, said the study showed there was still some concern by pregnant mothers around the safety of the flu vaccine.

“Monitoring safety, uptake and effectiveness is critical for any vaccine program but particularly for vaccines given in pregnancy. In our study, only one in three women had a flu vaccine during their pregnancy, despite the recommendations,” Prof Andrews said.

The FluMum Study was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). Participating institutions in the study were:

- Menzies School of Health Research
- The University of Queensland
- The University of Sydney
- The University of Melbourne
- The University of Adelaide
- Telethon Kids Institute
- Queensland University of Technology
- Australian National University

The full article is available [here](#).

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Menzies School of Health Research

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