



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
TUMWATER, WASHINGTON

January 31, 2011

Dear colleague:

I need your help to protect pregnant and post-partum women from the flu. Despite recommendations from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, and the CDC to vaccinate this population, there is still some hesitancy.

New data shows that we're not doing enough. Department of Health recently reviewed 731 records from December 2010 of pregnant women admitted to hospitals in 9 Washington counties. Of the nearly 80 percent of the records that included information on influenza vaccination status – **only 30 percent reported the patient was vaccinated at the time of delivery.**

Even if the opportunity is missed to vaccinate a woman during pregnancy, all unvaccinated, post-partum women, without contraindications for the flu vaccine, should be vaccinated to:

- Protect them since they are still at increased risk for severe influenza after delivery.
- Reduce the risk of getting influenza and then infecting the baby, who is too young to be vaccinated (a strategy known as “cocooning”).
- Protect the baby by boosting immunity that can be passed in breast milk.

Now is the time to increase efforts to vaccinate all pregnant women: influenza disease is still low in the Northwest and often peaks in February or March. Flu spreads quickly and so far more than half of the states report widespread or regional influenza outbreaks.

As a health care provider, you play an important role in stopping the flu. Pregnant women are more likely to be vaccinated when **you** offer flu vaccine. Providing factual information on flu vaccine may help them make an informed decision to protect against this disease.

Thank you for your work to keep Washington residents protected from influenza.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH".

Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH
State Health Officer