December 4, 2017

Dear Colleague:

As a healthcare provider, your patients trust your recommendation over any other source. Studies consistently show that pregnant women are more likely to be vaccinated against influenza when you routinely recommend and offer the flu shot.

Flu vaccination is recommended for pregnant and postpartum women by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Nurse Midwives, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Please consider the following messages when talking with your pregnant and postpartum patients about the importance of flu vaccination and prompt treatment for flu.

**Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant and postpartum women.**

- Getting the flu during pregnancy may cause serious problems for both mother and baby, including premature labor and delivery, unplanned hospitalization, and possibly death.

**Getting vaccinated is the best protection.**

- Women can get the flu shot any time during pregnancy or after birth, even if they are breastfeeding.
- The flu shot has been safely given to millions of pregnant women for over 50 years. The nasal spray flu vaccine is not recommended for anyone of any age this flu season.
- Getting a flu shot during pregnancy extends protection to babies for up to six months after birth — the time when babies cannot get vaccinated against flu and are particularly vulnerable.
- Recommend flu vaccination for household members and caregivers of pregnant and postpartum women. This will help protect not only the pregnant mother but also the new infant once he or she is born.

**Also recommend and offer Tdap vaccine to protect against whooping cough.** The CDC recommends administering Tdap vaccine as early as possible during the third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect newborns. Tdap vaccine can be administered concurrently with the flu vaccine for added convenience.
A new CDC study recently published in Clinical Infectious Diseases reported that vaccination with Tdap during the third trimester of pregnancy prevented more than three out of four (78 percent) cases of whooping cough in babies younger than two months.

Antiviral medication can treat the flu.

- Prompt treatment with antiviral medication is important. If a pregnant or postpartum woman gets sick with flu-like symptoms, she should call her doctor right away. Early treatment helps lessen symptoms and shortens the time she is sick by 1-2 days. Antiviral treatment can, and should, be started even before influenza is confirmed.

The Department of Health has a bilingual Frequently Asked Questions About Flu (Influenza) Vaccine and Pregnancy page that addresses common concerns, as well as flu and pregnancy flyers with additional resources for information and support.

Flu resources specific to providers and pregnant/postpartum patients are also available for printing purposes or online viewing. For additional flu information, visit the Department of Health’s Knock Out Flu website or the CDC website.

Thank you for helping pregnant and postpartum women make an informed decision about getting the flu shot this year, and every year.

Respectfully,

Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH
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Deputy Health Officer