Influenza (flu) can be very serious, especially in young babies. Luckily, there are many things mothers and other family members can do to help keep babies from getting sick, and to help babies recover more quickly if they do get sick.

Get Vaccinated!

Everyone who helps take care of your baby needs to be vaccinated against influenza. The CDC recommends that all people 6 months and older should receive the universal flu vaccine (which protects against both the 2009 H1N1 virus and other influenza viruses). Make sure everyone gets vaccinated as soon as it is available.

- Pregnant women should be vaccinated as soon as possible, no matter what trimester of pregnancy they are in.
- Pregnant women and caregivers of infants less than 6 months old are priority groups for influenza vaccination, so they should be able to get these vaccines even if they are hard to find.
- Millions of pregnant and breastfeeding women have safely used seasonal influenza vaccines for many decades.
- Recent studies have shown that babies are better protected from influenza when they are born when their mothers were vaccinated during pregnancy.

Breastfeed!

Your milk is custom-made to protect your baby from infection and to fight germs that are around you, even if they are brand new germs.

- Breastfeeding is critically important during the first 6 months, when babies are too young to get the flu vaccine, because it is the only way to improve babies’ ability to fight flu infection. As babies get older and explore their world, they are exposed to many more germs. This is why breastfeeding continues to be an important way to protect babies’ health even after they are vaccinated.

- Avoid exposing baby to formula and items that can spread germs. When your baby gets formula, it’s harder for your milk to protect your baby’s health. This makes your baby more likely to get sick, and for sicknesses to be much more serious. Baby bottles and pacifiers are extremely hard to keep clean; they pick up all kinds of germs from hands, bags, and furniture.

- Get Help. Ask an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) any questions or concerns you have about breastfeeding.
  - Before your baby is born, take a breastfeeding class.
  - When your baby is born, ask for help if you have pain or other any problems getting started breastfeeding, and ask about getting help from a lactation consultant after you go home.
  - When you go home, ask your family and friends for help so you and your baby can get lots of practice as you learn how to breastfeed.
  - Talk to your pediatrician about breastfeeding.

Keep Your Baby Close!

As soon as your baby is born, snuggle with your baby skin-to-skin. Keep your baby close after you go home, too. Make sure family and friends know this snuggling time is a prescription for keeping baby healthy.

- Immediate skin-to-skin contact makes your new baby’s immune system stronger and helps stabilize your baby’s heartbeat and breathing. Welcoming your baby this way also lets your baby latch onto your breast for the first time just right, all by himself. This makes breastfeeding much easier later on.

- Close contact between you and your baby is important throughout infancy.
  - Babies’ immune systems and brains grow better when they are held by their mothers.
- Being close helps you breastfeed as often as your baby needs. This protects your baby against feeding supplements that make it harder to fight infection.

- Hold your baby in your arms, a sling, or other carrier, especially when you’re away from home. Keeping your baby close protects against exposure to germs and other people who may be sick, especially if you and your baby are around other children.

**Ask Visitors to Wait**

Ask family and friends to help you keep your baby healthy by staying away while they have a cough, fever, or other flu symptoms.

**Get Rid of Germs**

- **Use a tissue** – When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and throw the tissue in the trash after using it.

- **In a pinch, an elbow will do** – If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow — avoid coughing or sneezing into your bare hands.

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand rubs.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** Wash your hands after you do.

- **Avoid giving baby things that cannot be properly cleaned** and can easily spread germs.

- **Wash your baby’s hands** with mild soap and warm water after being exposed to germs.

**What To Do If...**

**YOUR BABY Becomes Ill with Flu**

- **Keep breastfeeding!!** Your baby needs the infection-fighting antibodies in your milk now more than ever!

- Sick babies need to breastfeed even more often. Keep baby close and feed any time your baby gives you a feeding cue.

- Even if your baby has diarrhea or is vomiting, human milk is more easily and quickly absorbed than infant formula or electrolyte solutions.

- Always call your baby’s doctor if your baby becomes ill.

**SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY Becomes Ill with Flu**

- Call your doctor if you have been exposed to someone with flu symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue, diarrhea, or vomiting).

- Your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication to help you get well faster. These same medications are also used to protect you from getting the flu if you’ve been exposed to it.

- Antiviral flu medications work best when you begin them right after symptoms begin.

- Antiviral flu medications are safe to take while breastfeeding. Do not stop breastfeeding in order to take these medications.

- Keep your baby at least 6 feet away from someone who is sick until the sick person’s fever has been gone (without fever-reducing medication) for 24 hours.

**YOU Become Ill with Flu**

- Get lots of rest and drink lots of fluids.

- Ask a friend or family member who is not ill to help you take care of your baby so you can get better faster.

  - **If you are breastfeeding** – keep breastfeeding. Flu is spread in the droplets that come from coughs and sneezes, not through breast milk. In fact, the antibodies your body makes to help you fight the flu are also in your milk, so breastfeeding can help keep your baby from getting sick!

    - Wash your hands with soap and warm water before holding your baby and breastfeeding; wear a surgical mask while you are breastfeeding.

    - Contact a lactation consultant for help if you are too sick to breastfeed.

  - **If you are not breastfeeding** – ask a friend or family member to feed your baby.

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are health professionals with special knowledge and experience helping breastfeeding families. They can help you know how breastfeeding is going, answer your questions, and help you find solutions. To reach an IBCLC in your area, contact:

Or visit the “Find a Lactation Consultant Directory” at the website of the International Lactation Consultant Association: [www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org)