

Dear Vaccine Provider

From August 1 2009, all pregnant women in the Northern Territory should be offered free seasonal influenza vaccine. A national program funding seasonal influenza vaccine for all pregnant women will commence in January 2010. The NT Government is funding seasonal flu vaccine for pregnant women from now until the national program commences.

Why vaccinate pregnant women?

Influenza infection in pregnancy may cause increased rates of miscarriage, respiratory and cardiac conditions. In non-pandemic settings, pregnant women, especially those with chronic medical conditions, are at higher risk of severe influenza and hospitalisation¹.

Infants cannot receive the flu vaccine until 6 months of age but vaccination of mothers during pregnancy may help to protect children too young to be vaccinated². The recent H1N1 outbreak has increased the awareness of adverse outcomes of influenza acquired during pregnancy. Healthy pregnant women had an increased risk of complications and death due to influenza during the influenza pandemics of 1918-1919 and 1957-1958^{3,4}.

Is the vaccine safe to give at any time during pregnancy?

Yes. Influenza vaccine is safe and effective in all stages of pregnancy. It is safe to administer the vaccine to lactating women and those who may be immune-suppressed.

How do I order vaccine?

Order influenza vaccine now from your regional pharmacy and specify that it is for the “**Antenatal Influenza Vaccination program**” on your request. There is no charge to either the patient or your clinic for this vaccination.

How do I record the vaccine?

Record the immunisation event on the attached “Antenatal Influenza Vaccination Program Record Form” or print a list of influenza vaccines given from your clinic and fax the details to 892 28897 for electronic recording in the NT immunisation register.

A fact sheet about influenza vaccine has been attached to this memo for your distribution.

Yours Sincerely

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1. Dodds L, McNeil S, Fell DB, Allen VM, Coombs A, Scott J, MacDonald N. Impact of influenza exposure on rates of hospitalisations and physician visits because of respiratory illness among pregnant women *CMAJ* 2007;176(4):1463-8.

2. Zaman K Roy E, Arifeen SE et al. Effectiveness of maternal influenza immunisation in mothers and infants. *N Engl J Med* 2008;359:1555.

3. Harris JW. Influenza occurring in pregnant women. *JAMA* 1919;72: 978-80

4. Freeman DW, Barno A. Deaths from Asian influenza associated with pregnancy. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 1959;78:1172-5.