

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Celeste Philip, MD, MPH**  
Surgeon General and Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

January 17, 2018

Dear Colleague:

Influenza and influenza-like illness activity levels are high across the state and the nation. Florida is currently experiencing a moderately severe influenza season, with more visits to emergency departments from pregnant women, admissions for flu, and outbreaks reported to the Florida Department of Health than in the past few seasons. Elevated flu activity is expected for several more weeks. **The Department recommends that people who are able to get vaccinated do so as soon as possible.**

**We urge you to actively identify, recommend, and offer vaccination against influenza to your pregnant and postpartum patients:**

- **Influenza is five times more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant women than in women who are not pregnant.**
  - Changes in immune, heart, and lung functions during pregnancy increase the risk of severe complications from influenza infection.
  - Pregnant women with underlying health conditions are at greater risk for severe illness from influenza compared to their healthy counterparts.
  - Influenza infections also increase the risk for premature labor and delivery.
- **Pregnant women receiving a recommendation and offer of vaccination by their health care provider were over six times more likely to get vaccinated (65%) compared to women who did not receive a recommendation or offer (10%).**
- **Inactivated influenza vaccines are safe and the best protection for pregnant women and their fetuses.**
  - Inactivated trivalent and quadrivalent influenza vaccines are indicated for use in pregnant women. Postpartum women, including those who are breastfeeding, can receive the vaccine.
  - Vaccination is indicated at any time during the pregnancy.
  - Vaccination during pregnancy has been shown to protect both the mother and her infant (up to 6 months of age) from influenza illness, influenza hospitalizations, and influenza-related preterm birth. A recent population-based study concluded that those mothers who received seasonal trivalent influenza vaccine were significantly less likely to experience stillbirth compared to unvaccinated mothers (<https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/62/10/1221/2462656/Seasonal-Trivalent-Influenza-Vaccination-During>).
- **Early treatment with antivirals for influenza infection is important for pregnant women.**
  - Antiviral treatment is recommended **as early as possible** for pregnant or postpartum women with confirmed or suspected influenza. Delayed antiviral treatment (longer than two days) has been associated with increased risk of severe illness (such as hospitalization and death).
  - **A recent health advisory from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stresses the importance of rapid and early antiviral treatment** ([http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/\\_documents/cdc-han-influenza-12-27-2017.pdf](http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/_documents/cdc-han-influenza-12-27-2017.pdf)). **Clinicians should not wait for laboratory confirmation to administer antivirals for pregnant women with suspect influenza.**
- **Postpartum women and caretakers of children under six months of age should get vaccinated against influenza to protect against transmission of influenza to children too young to be vaccinated.**

You play a crucial role in helping to prevent influenza and its severe complications in your patients and their infants. If your practice didn't order or doesn't offer vaccine, please provide patients with information as to where to get an immunization: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/findaflushot>. Help refer patients to get immunization for their families and children. Children can often be the source of infection for influenza among pregnant women and their infants.

More information can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/> and [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm?s\\_cid=PN-NCIRD-Maternal-FluVax-AW-AllGroups-OY2FluSearch-Flu2](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm?s_cid=PN-NCIRD-Maternal-FluVax-AW-AllGroups-OY2FluSearch-Flu2).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carina Blackmore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carina" being more prominent than the last name "Blackmore".

Carina Blackmore, DVM, PhD, Dipl ACVPM  
Director, Division of Disease Control & Health Protection  
State Epidemiologist