

Pregnancy & the Flu: Why Expectant Moms Should Get Vaccinated

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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A recent study, paid for by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), appears to link one type of the flu vaccine with miscarriages. But the study, by the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute in Wisconsin, did not find anything definitive with 17 women having miscarriages that might be linked with vaccination.

The study appeared to raise more questions than it answered.

Dr. Michael Leonardi, a high risk obstetrician and director of obstetrics at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical in Peoria, Illinois, says many women don't get diagnosed with a miscarriage until potentially weeks after the baby has stopped developing, so it's entirely plausible some of them had already miscarried and didn't know it before they got the flu vaccine.

The one thing he stresses – the study is not a cause for alarm and should not discourage women from getting flu shots while they're pregnant.

SOT Dr. Michael Leonardi – High Risk Obstetrician – OSF HealthCare

(I think it's absolutely critical that people get flu shots in pregnancy. Pregnancy changes women's bodies in a lot of different ways. It changes how your lungs and how your heart work so the same woman who gets the flu while she's pregnant compared to her getting the flu in the year that she's not pregnant, she'll get far sicker if she's pregnant and it's not unusual for us to admit several women to the intensive care unit during pregnancy because of flu complications and sometimes we have to put them on ventilators or even rare circumstances put people on heart-lung bypass because their lungs are so damaged by the flu. :36)

V/O: Additionally, Dr. Leonardi says moms take care of babies from conception all the way through, so getting a flu shot while pregnant can actually protect the baby after birth.

SOT Dr. Michael Leonardi – High Risk Obstetrician – OSF HealthCare

(We have to keep in mind that anything that mom has immunity against crosses over into the baby, and then after the baby is born the baby's by the immunities or antibodies that the baby got from the mom before delivery and so the mother who is vaccinated against the flu during pregnancy protects herself which protects her unborn child she's also protecting the baby after it's born when the baby goes to grocery store or church or has to go to daycare things like that and is maybe surrounded by other people who aren't as well-informed as the baby's mom and didn't get the flu vaccine :42)

V/O: If a woman is still nervous about getting the flu vaccine, Dr. Leonardi suggests a couple of things. If you are planning a pregnancy and want to have the most reassurance, get your flu vaccine before you get pregnant. If you are already pregnant, schedule a visit with your obstetrician so you hear the baby's heartbeat and know things are okay before you get your flu vaccine rather than after. While it may not change the outcome if a miscarriage were to happen, it adds a layer of reassurance.