

## **PRINT-Health Officials Warn Pregnant Women: Get Flu, Whooping Cough Vaccines**

Jamelia Tinkham is nine months pregnant and during a check-up at OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center in Galesburg she was feeling more than ready to give birth to her first child. Tinkham, a school teacher, quickly offers a “yes” when asked if she has been vaccinated for the flu and whooping cough but that is not the case with many expectant mothers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is so alarmed about the number of women who have *not* received vaccines for the flu or whooping cough, it is issuing a warning that women are putting themselves and their infants at risk for severe illness and possibly death. The CDC reports 65% of women do *not* receive both recommended vaccines.

Dr. Samuel Fox, an OB GYN at OSF St. Mary Medical Center says he often finds himself battling misinformation and he says his young, healthy patients feel invincible.

**“It’s their first pregnancy and they’ve never really been sick before and overall they’re healthy as can be so they heard from a friend that the flu shot is bad and it can cause you to get the flu, it’s going to hurt your baby, so that’s where I think the information is really helpful in educating them on what’s true and what’s not true,” he shared.**

Dr. Fox also warns patients to see him immediately if they develop flu-like symptoms or have been exposed to someone sick with the flu.

**“Even if you’ve been exposed to someone who has the flu, you should also contact a provider to possibly get started on what they call prophylactics or preventative (medicine) to help lessen the severity of illness if you were to get sick from it,” he advised.**

According to Fox, pregnant women have lower immunity and they’re twice as likely to be hospitalized for the flu that non-pregnant women of child-bearing age.

**“The infection can cause such stress on your body that you could go into pre-term labor that ultimately leads to pre-term delivery and in severe cases, leads to maternal death due to respiratory compromise.”**

Infants who become infected with flu or whooping cough are at a high risk of hospitalization or death. When pregnant women are vaccinated they pass on antibodies to the fetus that provide protection after birth, during the time babies are too young to be vaccinated. Infants can’t receive a flu shot and whooping cough vaccines are administered in four doses, starting at two months.

The CDC recommends all expectant mothers get the flu vaccine as early as possible and the Tdap vaccine for whooping cough during the early part of the third trimester.

Also known as pertussis, whooping cough is easily spread family members visiting a newborn. Dr. Fox says if you aren’t sure whether you still have immunity from a previous vaccination, you can take a simple blood test that measures antibodies to determine whether you need a booster.

To get a flu or Tdap vaccine or booster, make an appointment [at your primary care office](#). Flu shots are also available at [OSF Urgo](#) or [PromptCare](#) locations.