

National Coalition for Infant Health: Maternal Vaccines: Protecting Two Lives with One Shot

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The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of more than 200 professional, clinical, community health, and family support organizations focused on improving the lives of premature infants through age two and their families. NCfIH's mission is to promote lifelong clinical, health, education, and supportive services needed by premature infants and their families. NCfIH prioritizes safety of this vulnerable population and access to approved therapies.

Vaccination during pregnancy is one of the most effective ways to protect both mother and baby from serious, preventable diseases. Nevertheless, despite strong recommendations from health experts, vaccine misinformation and hesitancy continue to put pregnant individuals and their newborns at unnecessary risk. It is time we cut through the noise and focus on the science: maternal vaccines save lives.

The Science Behind Maternal Vaccination:

When a pregnant woman receives a vaccine, her body creates antibodies that protect her and cross the placenta to shield her

Steering Committee

The National Coalition for Infant Health is supported by a volunteer steering committee: all of whom contribute significantly to lives of premature infants through work and parenting. Steering committee members represent national nonprofits, academic institutions, and parent organizations, and they provide leadership as well as help to mobilize partners in the field of prematurity.



baby in those critical first months of life. This passive immunity is essential since newborns are too young to receive certain vaccines. Four vaccines stand out as crucial during pregnancy:

- **COVID-19:** Protects both mother and baby from severe illness, complications, and preterm birth risks.
- **Influenza:** Reduces the risk of hospitalization due to flu-related complications, which can be severe in pregnancy.
- **TDAP (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis):** Prevents whooping cough, a disease that can be deadly for newborns.
- **RSV:** Helps prevent severe respiratory syncytial virus infections in infants.

Vaccination is a key public health strategy that has dramatically reduced childhood mortality from infectious diseases over the past century. The same principle applies to maternal immunization: preventing disease before it occurs rather than having to treat a life threatening illness. Despite clear benefits, vaccination rates among pregnant individuals remain suboptimal due to misinformation, fear, and systemic barriers to healthcare access. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring that all pregnant individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status, receive the protection they and their babies deserve.

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Addressing Concerns About Vaccine Safety:

It is natural to have concerns about anything that affects pregnancy. Fortunately, decades of research confirm that vaccines recommended during pregnancy are safe and effective. Health organizations, including the CDC and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, endorse maternal immunization based on substantial medical evidence.

When they occur, side effects are typically mild—such as a sore arm or slight fever. The risks of skipping vaccination, however, are far more significant. Complications from COVID-19, flu, and pertussis in pregnancy can lead to premature birth, stillbirth, and severe illness in newborns. Moreover, the hospitalization and

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If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, talk to your doctor today about which vaccines are right for you. Do not let misinformation dictate your health decisions—protect yourself and your baby with the power of science.

Healthcare providers, policymakers, and advocacy groups must also step up. Hospitals and clinics should implement stronger vaccine education programs, ensuring every pregnant patient receives clear, evidence-based guidance. Insurance companies and public health agencies should work to eliminate financial and logistical barriers that prevent expectant mothers from getting vaccinated.

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Ultimately, the goal is simple: a world where preventable diseases no longer threaten the health and well-being of newborns. Maternal vaccination is a powerful tool in achieving that future, and it is time we all recognize its importance. The choice is clear—vaccinate to protect, not just for yourself, but for the tiny life depending on you.

Reference:

1. <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/who-and-when/pregnant/index.html>

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