

Managing Colds, Flu, and COVID 19 during Pregnancy

Even during pregnancy, most colds and upper-respiratory infections, including COVID 19, come and go on their own. Comfort measures and maybe some over-the-counter (OTC) remedies are all that is needed to manage symptoms without lasting effect on the pregnant person or baby. A cough can linger for weeks, but most illnesses are viral and antibiotics are almost never needed.

Common sense precautions:

- Wear a surgical mask over BOTH your nose and mouth. Cloth masks are not as effective.
- Frequent, thorough hand washing with soap and water is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infection. Use hand sanitizer if you can't use soap and water.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy food, drink plenty of fluids, get enough sleep, and isolate if you are sick.
- Get vaccinated for both seasonal flu and COVID
- Have everyone in your family vaccinated.

Comfort measures and OTC remedies:

For a cough:

- Herbal tea with honey
- Elderberry syrup
- A tablespoon of apple-cider vinegar and tablespoon of honey in a mug of steaming water
- Any OTC cough syrup containing dextromethorphan and/or guaifenesin (Robitussin, Delsym, Mucinex)

For congestion:

- A room humidifier, plenty of hot steamy showers
- A "steam tent" with 5 drops of tea-tree oil, or eucalyptus oil in a bowl of very hot, steaming water (cover your head and the bowl with a towel and breathe)
- Neti-pot, or sinus rinse
- Nasal decongestant spray containing oxymetazoline (Afrin), not more than 3-5 days due to risk of dependence
- Antihistamines containing diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
- Occasional use of pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) if you don't have high blood pressure

- Phenylephrine is OK, but not as effective as Sudafed.

Sore throat:

- Gargle with 1 tsp. of salt in 8 oz. of very warm water
- Sip on hot chicken, beef, or vegetable broth
- Any over the counter throat lozenge, spray, or cough drop
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) as directed on the bottle, to a maximum of 4 grams/day

If symptoms are worsening or severe, you have asthma, smoke, or are having difficulty breathing, please call the office. Prescription medications may be needed in some circumstances.

Medicines to **avoid** during pregnancy: Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), Aleve (Naproxen), Aspirin, powders, and medicines containing bismuth or salicylates (Pepto-Bismol)

The Flu:

Pregnant people are considered a high-risk group and are more likely to develop complications from influenza infection. Please consider a flu shot if you haven't had one. You cannot get the flu from a flu shot.

Most people with the flu develop:

- Fever >100.0
- Body and muscle aches

You may also experience:

- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting

Pregnant people with the flu, or directly exposed to someone with the flu may need a prescription for Tamiflu. Please call the office, see your PCP, or visit a "Minute Clinic" for diagnosis and treatment of the flu during pregnancy.

COVID Infection:

Just like the flu, pregnant people who contract a COVID infection are more likely to develop serious illness, need a breathing tube, or to suffer fatal complications. Fortunately for most, particularly if you are vaccinated and boosted, symptoms are mild and will resolve on their own. You can use the comfort measures and OTC remedies above.

Early testing is very important. If you are exposed or have any symptoms, get tested. Refer to the link below for the most recent isolation and quarantine guidelines:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

Notify the office if you test positive and you are very sick. We may suggest that you need emergency care.

Serious symptoms include:

- Experiencing increasing shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest.
- Confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face

Duke has a limited quantity of monoclonal antibodies available and is prioritizing pregnant people. IV infusion of these antibodies may help the body fight off infection. Both monoclonal antibodies and the antiviral medications have emergency FDA approval, but it's unclear how beneficial they are against the different viral strains. Antiviral medications are sometimes administered in an inpatient setting. Treatment of severe illness is managed in the emergency room, or hospital setting. We do not provide evaluation or treatment in our office.

We strongly recommend the COVID vaccine for our pregnant patients. COVID vaccine safety is established, it is FDA approved, and is very effective at preventing severe infection, and death from COVID infection. Complications from the vaccine are rare, but the benefits outweigh the risks.