



Royal College of
Paediatrics and
Child Health



Royal College of
Obstetricians and
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Setting standards to improve women's health

Swine Flu: Questions and answers for parents of newborn babies

What can I do to stop my baby catching swine flu?

If at all possible, newborn babies should not have close contact with people who are known to have flu or who may have flu. However it is not considered necessary to separate healthy newborn babies from mothers who are unwell with swine flu. A parent with flu symptoms may choose to separate themselves from a baby who was born prematurely or has other medical problems, until the flu symptoms have improved.

Everybody around your baby can reduce the risk of catching or spreading swine flu by practising good respiratory and hand hygiene:

- Always covering the nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Then washing hands with soap and warm water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face, or to other people including the baby.

This message is being made public by the UK Government's "Catch it, Bin it, Kill it" campaign.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080839

Parents in particular can help reduce the risk of catching swine flu by:

- Always washing their own hands before preparing feeds and meals.
- Washing the hands of the baby and older siblings after play and before meals.
- Frequently cleaning hard surfaces, such as door handles, using a normal cleaning product.

What about vaccines?

Vaccines for swine flu are now available and are being given in order of priority to groups at risk of severe disease. Pregnant women are known to be at risk of severe disease from swine flu. The vaccine is being offered to pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy to protect these women and their unborn babies. Vaccinating pregnant mothers also protects babies as immunity is shared in the womb and, after birth, in breast milk.

Can my baby have the swine flu vaccine?

Unfortunately flu vaccinations don't work well in babies under 6 months old and are not normally given to them. This is another reason why it is important for all pregnant women to be vaccinated.

Should newborn babies avoid public areas or public transport?

It is not possible to avoid all contact with the virus in the community. Avoiding public places where there is close contact with many people will reduce the risks, but this would be a personal choice. Good respiratory hand hygiene (as described above) is thought to be more important than avoiding public places.

Should mothers continue to breast feed if they have swine flu or if they are taking antiviral medicine?

Breastfeeding is important for babies and mothers. Breastfeeding promotes attachment between mother and baby. Breastfeeding should be continued where practical, even when the mother is unwell with swine flu. Breast milk gives babies the most appropriate nutrition for health and is rich in antibodies that can protect the baby from many infections.

The flu virus is not found in breast milk so the risk of swine flu transmission through breast milk is small. However if you have swine flu it is likely that your baby will also catch it because of normal close contact between a mother and baby. You can reduce but not eliminate this risk by careful respiratory hand hygiene (as described above).

Breastfeeding mothers who develop swine flu will be offered antiviral treatment in the normal way. Mothers should continue to breast feed their baby even if they are being treated with antiviral medicine. As for other adults the preferred medicine is Tamiflu. Very small amounts of Tamiflu are found in breast milk and this is not thought to be harmful.

If a baby is born and breastfeeding is started while the mother is taking Relenza, she should complete the course of Relenza. It is not necessary to switch to Tamiflu.

What are the symptoms of swine flu in babies?

The symptoms of swine flu in infants are the same as those of many other serious infections. You should always seek medical advice if you think your baby is unwell or has a high temperature.

A newborn baby with flu usually has a high temperature PLUS any of the following symptoms:

- Breathing quickly, shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty feeding due to breathlessness
- Cough
- Vomiting

What should I do if I think my baby has swine flu?

If you think that your baby has the symptoms of swine flu or any high fever, you should contact your GP straight away. You will then be advised about what to do next. Do not go directly to your GP surgery unless advised to do so, because special arrangements are being made for the assessment of all children less than one year old that have flu like illness.

If your baby is assessed as needing treatment for swine flu, you will be provided with an authorisation voucher, which can be used by a parent or flu friend to collect antiviral medicine from a local Antiviral Collection Point.

Where can I get further information?

Visit http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_178075 or call the Swine Flu Information line on 0800 151 3513.

This document was developed by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology with support from the Department of Health HMG UK.