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YOUR PREGNANCY: PROTECTING BABY STARTS NOW
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National Immunization Awareness Month is a reminder
that we all need vaccines throughout our lives.

From the moment you found out you were pregnant, you started protecting your baby. You might have changed the way you eat, started taking a prenatal vitamin, and researching the kind of car seat you’ll buy. But did you know that one of the best ways to start protecting your children against serious diseases is by making sure you get the whooping cough (Tdap) and flu vaccines while you are pregnant?

The vaccines you get during your pregnancy will provide your baby with some disease protection (immunity) that will last the first months of life. By getting vaccinated during your pregnancy, your baby may benefit from passive antibody transfer that will help protect against diseases. This early protection is critical for diseases like the flu and whooping cough because infants in the first several months of life are at the greatest risk of severe illness from these diseases. However, they are too young to be vaccinated themselves. Passing maternal antibodies on to them is the only way to help directly protect them.

Passing the protection to your newborn isn’t the only reason you should get vaccinated. Whooping cough and flu vaccines are also important for you. In cases when doctors are able to determine who spread whooping cough to an infant, the mother was often the source. Once you have protection by getting the Tdap vaccine, you are less likely to give whooping cough to your newborn while caring for him.

When it comes to flu, even if you are generally healthy, changes in immune, heart, and lung functions during pregnancy make you more likely to have a severe case of the flu if you catch it. If you catch the flu when you are pregnant, you have a higher chance of experiencing pregnancy complications, such as premature labor and delivery. Getting a flu shot will help protect you and your baby while you are pregnant.
You can also rest assured that these vaccines are very safe for you and your baby. Millions of pregnant women have safely received flu shots for many years, and the CDC continues to gather data showing that the flu shot is safe and effective during pregnancy.

The whooping cough vaccine is also very safe for you and your unborn baby. Doctors and midwives who specialize in caring for pregnant women agree that the whooping cough vaccine is important to get during the third trimester of each pregnancy. Getting the vaccine during your pregnancy will not put you at increased risk for pregnancy complications.

You can get the whooping cough and flu vaccine at the same time during your pregnancy. You can also get them at different visits. If you are pregnant during flu season, you should get the flu vaccine as early as possible. You should get your whooping cough vaccine between your 27th and 36th week of pregnancy, but you can get a flu shot during any trimester.

If you want to learn more about pregnancy and vaccines, talk to you ob-gyn, midwife or call the Monongalia County Health Department at 304-598-5119 for more information.

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