Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for any person (6 months+) who wishes to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza.*

People at increased risk of influenza complications:

- Older adults (65+)
- Indigenous Australians (15+)
- Those (over 6 months old) with underlying medical conditions such as
  - Pregnant women
  - Heart conditions, severe asthma, lung conditions, diabetes (type 1 and 2), chronic neurological disease, renal and metabolic disease, and impaired immunity
  - Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
  - People who may transmit flu to high-risk individuals.

* This group may qualify for free vaccine under the Australian Government’s National Immunisation Program.
Vaccinating pregnant women against influenza gives a 3 for 1 benefit:

- protects the woman during pregnancy and in the early months of motherhood
- protects the young infant by transplacental antibodies
- protects the young infant by antibodies in breast milk.

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INFLUENZA VACCINATION AND PREGNANCY

(WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) has identified pregnant women as the most important risk group for seasonal influenza vaccination. Antibodies in a pregnant woman’s blood are actively transported to the fetus, especially in late pregnancy. Scheduling vaccines during pregnancy is not new, mimicking ‘mother’s gift of immunity to her offspring’. Administration of killed influenza virus vaccines during pregnancy was common for much of the last 50 years in the USA, and then became widely used again around the world during and after the 2009-10 H1N1 pandemic. For pregnant women, influenza vaccination protects against well-recognised morbidity and mortality of influenza infection. For babies aged 6 months or younger, maternal influenza vaccination during pregnancy is the most effective way to protect young babies at an age when they are most susceptible to disease but least responsive to vaccines. Inactivated influenza vaccination during pregnancy has been consistently shown to be safe for the unborn baby.

REFERENCES:

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The Immunisation Coalition is a not for profit organisation consisting of medical and science specialists from around Australia and New Zealand, with an expertise in influenza and other infectious diseases.

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