

# Pregnant women need to protect themselves from viruses

Ah-choo.

When you're pregnant the last thing you need is to get sick. After all, you've probably been nauseated and tired enough.

And simple winter maladies such as colds and flu can be dangerous and even deadly for moms-to-be. But a few precautions – and knowing when to call the doctor – can keep those illnesses at the level of mildly annoying.

“Avoiding getting sick is a difficult thing; there's no way other than avoiding going out with anyone at all,” said Dr. Robert O. Atlas, chairman of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Baltimore's Mercy Medical Center. “All pregnant patients should get a flu vaccine.”

Dr. Atlas said doctors used to recommend that women who were in their second or third trimester during the winter months get the flu vaccine, but now they recommend that “if you're pregnant at all in flu season – get it.”

Although it's extremely rare, pregnant women who get the flu are at a higher risk for death than non-pregnant women.

If you do get sick, stay hydrated.

Dr. Atlas points out that the long-touted remedy of chicken soup does indeed have both liquid and electrolytes.

If a pregnant woman feels sick and can't keep anything down, she needs to go to the hospital and get checked out. “Dehydration poses a risk to the baby,” Dr. Atlas said. He recalled one case where severe nausea and vomiting early in the pregnancy caused the woman to lose her baby.

“Don't ignore symptoms,” Dr. Atlas said. “If you can keep food down and stay hydrated you're probably OK at home, but if you can't hold anything down, call your

doctor. If you can't shake it, call your doctor. People can get quite sick in eight to 12 hours."

For relief from the aches and pains of the flu, Dr. Atlas said Tylenol is fine but only in recommended doses – exceeding those doses can harm the baby. Ibuprofen is not recommended, he said, nor is aspirin as there is a potential for harm to the baby.

For coughs, he recommends Robitussin DM, and for an over-the-counter antihistamine he prefers Clortrimaton. Some decongestants work by constricting blood vessels, he noted, and theoretically there could be a risk of reducing blood flow to the uterus.

He also recommends hand-washing – for everyone.

But he notes that what feels like the start of a cold might just be the start of being a mom.

"A lot of patients think they may be sick because they have a runny nose or even a bloody nose, but these are common effects of just being pregnant," he said.