

NHS launches campaign to encourage pregnant women to get vaccinated against potentially deadly viruses

The North East and North Cumbria's NHS has launched a new campaign to encourage pregnant women to get vaccinated against potentially deadly viruses including flu, whooping cough and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

The region has seen a spike in preventable whooping cough cases among infants, due to a decrease in the number of pregnant women getting vaccinated, and doctors are keen to reverse the trend.

7,599 laboratory-confirmed cases of whooping cough were reported in England from January to May 2024, compared with 858 for the whole of 2023.

Dr Catherine Monaghan, consultant physician specialising in respiratory medicine and medical director at NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) said: "Pregnancy is an exciting time, but it can bring with it lots of questions and unknowns.

"As doctors and medical professionals, we want to reassure mums that the recommended vaccines are the best way to protect both your baby and yourself.

"When you are pregnant, your immune system is weakened, so you are more susceptible to viruses. That's why it's important to keep as healthy and protected as possible.

"When fewer people get their vaccines, it means more whooping cough and more babies getting ill unnecessarily. Babies are not naturally protected against the virus.

"We really hope that mums-to-be will feel reassured that the vaccines are safe and effective. Vaccines like whooping cough, RSV and flu do not contain live viruses and can't make you or your baby sick. There could be mild side effects like a sore arm but that's completely normal.

"If you have any concerns, please speak to your midwife who can help you make an informed decision for you and your baby."

The campaign features midwives, nurses, and new mothers with their healthy babies, to reassure mums-to-be that the recommended vaccines are safe for them and their unborn children.

Kate Gresswell, mum to four-month-old Birdie, said: “Getting vaccinated just seemed like an easy decision for me. I wanted to be protected against flu so I could be healthy for my baby and, of course, I didn’t want her to get sick with whooping cough once she was born.

“My midwife was brilliant, and I trusted her implicitly. I got my vaccinations at routine checkups and scan appointments. They were quick, painless, and totally worth it.”

Alex Pyne, vaccination nurse at James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough, added: “I’m hopeful that by seeing other mums and healthy babies, mums-to-be will feel encouraged to get protected. Flu season is just around the corner, so it’s important to be fully protected.”

If you are pregnant and would like to learn more about which vaccinations are right for you, please search ‘NHS vaccinations in pregnancy’ and speak to your midwife.

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