my body

flu and winter wellness

During pregnancy, your body has a harder time fighting off viruses like the cold and the flu. It is helpful to try to keep yourself healthy and to be prepared if you do get sick.

Prevention

Wash your hands

This is one of the best ways to prevent germs from spreading. When washing your hands, thoroughly scrub with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you don't have soap and water nearby, you can use a hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol. Wash your hands before and after eating, after you've touched surfaces in public places (like door knobs and stair railings), and after using the restroom.

Wear a mask in public places

Most of the information we have about masks preventing illness is from studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Masks can also reduce the spread of other viruses that travel through droplets in the air. Some studies showed that people who wore well-fitting masks in indoor public places lowered their risk of testing positive for COVID-19 by up to 83%. Masks help protect others around you if you are sick. Cloth and surgical masks help a little bit, but fitted masks (KN95 or N95) work the best.

Get a flu and COVID-19 vaccine

Both the COVID-19 and flu vaccines are safe during pregnancy. When you get vaccinated, you also pass antibodies (proteins your body makes to fight infection) to the baby. This gives the baby an added immunity boost and helps to protect them after they are born. This is especially important because newborns are too young to get these vaccines themselves after birth.

Make sure you are getting enough vitamins and minerals

The best way for your body to get nutrients is through your food. Some vitamins and minerals that have been studied to keep you healthy are iron, zinc, vitamin C, and vitamin D. Leafy greens, fish, citrus fruits, lean meats, and fortified cereals are good sources of vitamins. We will check your iron levels and let you know if you need additional supplementation in addition to your prenatal vitamin.

Get moving!

Physical activity has many benefits. Some studies show that it may help prevent illness. You don't have to do anything too difficult. Walking for 30 minutes a day, three times a week, can improve your health. Physical activity can be more difficult in the winter months. Some ideas for indoor movement are online workouts, prenatal yoga, dancing, or walking inside a large indoor space (like a mall or track).

Get plenty of sleep

For many, it is difficult to find enough time to get a full night of sleep. This is especially true during pregnancy when it is harder to get comfortable. Finding a routine to help you wind down before bedtime might be helpful. Limiting your screen time, taking a warm bath or shower, and making sure you have comfortable pillows to position yourself can help. If you cannot add to the hours of sleep at night, try to find a few minutes throughout your day to just rest and relax. Put your feet up, drink a cup of tea, or just close your eyes for a moment. These little acts of self care can do wonders for your body and your mental health.

What about herbs?

There is a growing body of research that certain herbs might help prevent illness. Echinacea root tincture has been found to help with common colds, and elderberry syrup is good when you have an upper respiratory infection. Before you take any herbal supplement or remedy, we recommend that you check with your midwife to ensure that it is safe to use during pregnancy or while nursing.

I'm sick, now what?

Contact your midwife immediately (day or night) if you have any of these symptoms

- A fever 100.4 °F or higher, fever longer than 48hrs, or chills.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or body.
- Feeling your baby move less or not at all.
- Vomiting that is severe or doesn't stop.
- Dizziness or fainting spells.
- Blurred vision or spots before your eyes.
- Severe or long-lasting headaches that don't get better with Tylenol, rest, and hydration.
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- New confusion.
- Inability to wake or stay awake.
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds (depending on skin tone).

COVID-19 testing

COVID-19 is often mistaken for a cold, so even if your symptoms are not severe, please take a COVID-19 test. Common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

If you test positive for COVID-19, please contact your midwife as soon as possible.

How can I tell if it is a cold or the flu?

If your COVID-19 test comes back negative, you might wonder if you have a cold or the flu. A cold is usually mild and goes away on its own and is usually not serious. On the other hand, the flu can lead to serious complications for a pregnant person and their baby.

While their symptoms are pretty similar, there are some differences to note:

Symptoms	Common cold	The flu (influenza)
Onset	Very slow, gradual	Fast
Fever	Rare	Often
Body aches, chills	Rare	Often
Sneezing, stuffy nose, sore throat	Often	Sometimes
Cough	Mild or no cough	Often

Adapted from cdc.gov

Even if you've been vaccinated for the flu, you need to contact your midwife as soon as possible if you think you might have it. They may recommend antiviral medicines, like Tamiflu, to reduce the chance of serious complications. These work best when taken 48 hours after the start of symptoms. In some cases, they are recommended if you have been in close contact with someone who has the flu (even before you have symptoms).

> **If you suspect you have the flu or have been in close contact with someone who has the flu, call your midwife as soon as possible.**

Relief for common symptoms

For more information about safe medicines during pregnancy, see the "Easing Discomforts in Pregnancy" handout in the first trimester section of this binder.