

How do I protect my child who is under 6 months of age from H1N1 infection?

Immunization against H1N1 influenza is the best possible protection but is not available for children under six months of age. It's important that your child not be exposed to other children who are sick, and that if your child has a flu-like illness he or she does not expose other people, in order to keep from spreading illness. There are some things you can do to keep you and your child healthy:

Remember to Clean, Cover and Contain:

Clean: Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing and before handling your baby. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. You should also keep common surfaces and items, including toys and change tables, clean and disinfected with regular household disinfectants. As infants under 6 months of age are teething, it is important to keep all items such as teething rings, rattles, pacifiers, etc., washed and rinsed.

Cover: Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. Put your used tissue in the waste basket.

Contain: Avoid close contact with sick people, and ask visitors to stay home if they are ill. Stay away from crowds where you are unsure of the immunization status or level of illness. If you are in contact with people and you do not know if they are ill, maintain a 2 meter (6 foot) distance.

Limit the number of people, especially strangers, who hold your baby.

If your baby is due soon, choosing to breastfeed will provide additional immunity from the mom. If you are breastfeeding, continue as long as possible. The Public Health Agency of Canada states, "Breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding is the best way to protect your baby from all illnesses because of the antibodies passed from mother to child. Women who become ill can safely continue to breastfeed their babies. While it isn't known if the flu virus can be passed through breast milk, the benefits of the antibodies in breast milk mean that it continues to be the best way to keep your baby healthy."

Stay healthy by ensuring proper nutrition. If you are breastfeeding continue to do so as this is the best nutrition for your child. For more details, visit:

http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/hsi/H1N1_BF_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

Now that the vaccine is available encourage those who have contact with your child to be immunized, this also helps to prevent spread of illness to them.

If you or your child gets sick with a flu-like illness, stay home from work, school, child care centres, and play groups; and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. If you are sick and there is no one else to care for your baby wear a facemask if available. If your child becomes ill contact your health care provider or call the Healthline at 1-888-709-2929.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.

More details on prevention messages are on our website:

http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/childcare/pdf/Flu_Prevention_Checklist_for_Child_Care_Settings.pdf.