

# *The Americas Leads in Vaccination of Pregnant Women against Influenza*

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The Region of the Americas is a leader in vaccinating pregnant women against influenza, a public health problem that for future mothers, newborns, and other high-risk populations can mean severe disease, complications, and hospitalization.

In all, 32 of the Region's 52 countries and territories, which contain the majority of the Region's women, vaccinate pregnant women to protect them from influenza, an acute viral infection that is transmitted from person to person.

Influenza epidemics cause between 3 and 5 million cases of severe disease, and some 250,000 to 500,000 deaths worldwide each year. In the Americas, between 40,000 and 160,000 people are estimated to die yearly as a consequence of the disease, the majority of victims being over the age of 65.

"Vaccination is the most effective way of preventing the disease and its serious consequences for pregnant women, as well as for fetus and newborn," said Cuauhtémoc Ruiz, chief of the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which is the World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Office for the Americas. "Influenza vaccines are safe and effective, and

have been used for over 70 years,” said Ruiz-Matus.

Pregnant women are especially susceptible to complications from influenza because of physiological changes in the cardiopulmonary and immune systems that occur with pregnancy. Influenza during pregnancy can cause fetal death, premature delivery, low birth weight.

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