What is influenza?
Flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus. The virus is easily passed from person to person through the air when someone who has flu coughs and sneezes without covering their mouth or nose.

The illness of flu usually starts quickly. Three key symptoms of flu are fever, dry cough and muscle aches and pains. Other symptoms may include tiredness, weakness, headache, running nose and sore throat.

Complications from flu infection can include pneumonia, worsening of other illnesses and, rarely, death.

Vaccination is recommended for people at risk of severe flu or complications, such as people aged 65 years and older, those with a chronic illness and pregnant women.

Vaccination provides the best protection against flu for both pregnant women and their unborn child.

Where can I get more information?
Speak to your doctor, midwife or clinic nurse.

Tasmanian Public Health Hotline 1800 671 738
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Immunise Australia 1800 671 811
www.immunise.health.gov.au

Produced by the Public Health Services, Department of Health and Human Services.
It is safe to get a flu vaccine when you are pregnant. In fact, you should receive the vaccine to best protect both yourself and your baby.

Pregnancy puts extra stress on your heart and lungs. It can also affect your immune system. These factors increase your risk of getting sick with flu. It also increases your risk of having serious complications, such as pneumonia and breathing difficulties. Flu complications increase the risk of early labour and miscarriage.

Getting the vaccine when you are pregnant can also protect your newborn baby in the first few months after birth.

This is important. Infants are at high risk of complications from the flu, but those younger than six months are too young to be vaccinated.

**When do I get the vaccine?**

Vaccination is usually available in early autumn to cover the winter flu season. The vaccine is safe at any point in the pregnancy.

The seasonal flu vaccine is provided free for pregnant women, although your GP may charge a fee for their service.

For more information about flu vaccination, speak with your midwife, clinic nurse or doctor.

**TRUE: Flu can be serious**

Flu is sometimes dismissed as a mild illness. Many people refer to ‘common colds’ as flu.

However, flu is a serious condition, particularly in the elderly and those with chronic illness. Pregnant women are hospitalised with flu every year in Tasmania.

**TRUE: The vaccine is safe for pregnant women**

The seasonal flu vaccine is safe to give in all stages of pregnancy. International studies on the safety of the vaccine show no evidence of harm to the unborn baby from vaccinating pregnant women.

Just as for the wider community, the flu vaccine can cause mild side effects. These include soreness, pain and swelling at the injection site. Side effects usually resolve quickly without any treatment. If reactions are severe or persistent, contact your doctor or hospital.

**FALSE: The flu vaccine can give you the flu**

The seasonal flu vaccine (provided free for pregnant women) can never give you the flu. There is no live virus in this vaccine.

The vaccine prevents most strains of flu for most people. It takes about two weeks to provide that protection. If you’re unlucky, you may be exposed to a flu virus (or another virus) just before or very soon after having the flu vaccine. If this happens, you may have a flu-like illness in the week or so after being vaccinated.

**FALSE: The flu vaccine contains thiomersal**

The seasonal flu vaccine (provided free for pregnant women) does not contain the mercury-based preservative thiomersal.

**FALSE: Current flu vaccines cause Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)**

GBS is a rare condition (one to two cases per 100 000 people per year) which affects the body’s nerves. It may occur as a rare complication of common gastro and respiratory infections, including flu.

In the USA, GBS cases were associated with a particular flu vaccine in 1976. Studies conducted since then have not found a higher risk of GBS associated with flu vaccines.