Planning for a cohort study to investigate the impact and management of influenza in pregnancy in a future pandemic

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Plain English summary

Impact and management of influenza in pregnancy
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Pregnant women have an increased chance of developing infections and becoming seriously ill; this includes being more likely to catch influenza (flu). During the ‘swine flu’ pandemic of 2009–10 we carried out a study to investigate the effect of flu on pregnant women using a system called the UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS). We set up UKOSS in 2005 to study serious rare conditions affecting pregnant women, so, when ‘swine flu’ was declared as a pandemic, we rapidly set in place a study to look at its effects in pregnancy. We found that pregnant women had an increased risk of becoming severely ill and were also more likely to have a stillborn or premature baby. The results from the study were used to make changes to the treatment offered to pregnant women infected with ‘swine flu’ and also led to the recommendation that all pregnant women should receive vaccination against seasonal flu routinely – this is the flu that occurs every year in winter time. We know that, even though there is not a flu pandemic currently, a small number of pregnant women have nevertheless died from seasonal flu.

Using our experience from the ‘swine flu’ pandemic we have set everything in place so that if there is another flu pandemic we can rapidly activate a new UKOSS study to investigate what happens. This will provide the necessary information, once again, to enable treatment and vaccination provided during pregnancy to be tailored to the particular needs of pregnant women.
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