Protecting Mothers with Influenza and their Infants and Families

You have a suspected or confirmed case of Influenza (which is likely to be 2009 H1N1, as this is the predominant strain circulating in Illinois right now). Influenza is caused by a respiratory virus that is easily spread from droplets and secretions. During labor, there are the special precautions that we recommend to keep your baby and significant others safe:

- Limit visitors to only the person you need most
- Your visitor must wear a face mask (and eye protection and gowns during pushing)
- All caregivers and visitors should be vaccinated (seasonal and 2009 H1N1)
- Ideally, you will wear a facemask during labor and pushing
- All healthcare providers will wear protective equipment

Patients with influenza who have a fever and are coughing are highly contagious. Because infants are thought to be at higher risk for severe illness from 2009 H1N1 infection, the safest approach recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is to isolate your baby from anyone who has influenza (including you). Here is the most cautious approach to protect your baby from exposure to the flu virus during and after delivery:

- Before delivery, we will ask you to carefully wash your hands and change your mask and gown. We will place a clean blanket across your chest so you can see and hold your infant.
- It is best to avoid exposure of the infant to anyone with influenza, so the safest approach is to have other people care for and feed your baby. We will provide 24/7 care of your infant in the nursery.
- Flu can be very serious in young babies. Babies who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than babies who are breastfed. So, breastfeeding is recommended for your infant since there are many ways that breastfeeding and breast milk protect babies’ health. Mothers pass on protective antibodies to their baby during breastfeeding. Antibodies are a type of protein made by the immune system in the body. Antibodies help fight off infection.
- Since you are highly contagious while you are coughing, it is best for you to express (pump) your breast milk and have someone who is not sick give your baby your expressed milk. You should wash your hands, change gowns and wear a mask while pumping. Our staff will assist you with this and either nursery staff or a healthy family member can feed your baby in the nursery. It is OK to take medicines to treat the flu while you are breastfeeding.
- We recommend that you remain isolated from your infant until you have been treated for 48 hours with Tamiflu™, you are without fever for 24 hours and you can control your cough and secretions. In this way, you will be less infectious. You should still wear a mask, practice hand washing and use a clean blanket when holding your infant for a period of seven days after the onset of your illness or for 24 hours after your symptoms resolve (whichever time period is longer).
- When you go home, if there is no one else who can take care of your baby while you are sick, try to wear a face mask at all times when you are feeding or caring for your baby. You should also be very careful about washing your hands and taking everyday precautions to prevent your baby from getting flu (http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm). Using a cloth blanket between you and your baby during feedings also might help.