



COVID-19 Vaccine During Pregnancy or Breastfeeding

Discussion with Obstetrical Care Provider

(General Practitioner, Nurse Practitioner, Midwife or Obstetrician)

Getting the COVID vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice for most people.

THERE IS NO EVIDENCE about whether the vaccine is safe or effective during pregnancy because the COVID vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnant people and those who are breastfeeding.

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada recommends that pregnant and breastfeeding individuals who are eligible to receive the COVID vaccine are offered vaccination as long as there are no other contraindications.

What we know about mRNA COVID vaccines:

- The vaccines do not contain live virus.
- The vaccines do not contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant people, to the fetus, or to the breastfed baby.

Risk of getting sick from COVID-19 is higher if you:

- Have contact with people outside your home
- Have pre-existing medical conditions (like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, immunosuppressive conditions or chronic respiratory conditions)
- Are overweight
- Are a health care provider or essential worker
- Are 35 years or older

Additional considerations:

- Gestation (for example, low risk individuals could consider waiting until after the first trimester or if delivery imminent, could delay until postpartum)
- The individual's personal values

Side effects of getting the vaccine may include:

- Pain or swelling where the needle was given
- Tiredness
- Joint Pain
- Fever (Tylenol is safe to use during pregnancy, ensure you take it to reduce fever)
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Headache

After receiving the vaccine, continue to follow the current guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19 including:

- Wearing a mask
- Staying at least two metres away from others
- Minimizing your "bubble" and following all restrictions on public and private gatherings
- Washing hands or using hand sanitizer
- Avoiding all non-essential travel
- Following any applicable workplace guidance
- Following quarantine guidance after exposure to COVID-19

For more information on risks, benefits and recommendations, see the Patient Information below.



COVID-19 Vaccine During Pregnancy or Breastfeeding

Checklist of Understanding

*this is an optional tool for patient record (include patient info in box below)

Patient to INITIAL boxes AND in Name Box below:

- ☐ I have discussed the risks and benefits of Covid-19 vaccination in pregnancy with my healthcare provider.
- ☐ I understand that **THERE IS NO EVIDENCE** about whether the vaccine is safe or effective during pregnancy.
- ☐ Due to the risks discussed above, I understand that I am considered higher risk of getting infected or becoming severely ill from COVID-19. Ideally I would wait to be vaccinated until after I have completed pregnancy and breastfeeding, but due to the risks I consent to being immunized.
- ☐ I understand that my healthcare provider recommends I get vaccinated during pregnancy because the benefits of vaccination are likely greater than the potential risks for me.

I have discussed the above with my Obstetrical Care Provider.

[SHA 0107 Pregnant Women – Benefit/Risk Information](#) or [SHA 0108 Breastfeeding Women – Benefit/Risk Information](#) will be signed at the immunization if individual consents to vaccination.

Complete if part of patient health record:

Patient Name: _____

HSN: _____

Patient Initials: _____



**The following information is about the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.
These are also called “mRNA” vaccines.*

For most people, getting the COVID vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice.

However, these vaccines have not been tested in pregnant and breastfeeding people yet. The information below will help you make an informed choice about whether to get an mRNA COVID vaccine while you are pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or while breastfeeding.

Your options:

1. **Get a COVID vaccine as soon as you are eligible to receive it.**
2. **Wait for more information about the vaccines in pregnancy/breastfeeding.**

What are the benefits of getting an mRNA Covid vaccine?

1. **COVID is dangerous. It is more dangerous for pregnant people.**
 - a. COVID patients who are pregnant are 5 times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) or on a ventilator than COVID patients who are not pregnant.
 - b. Preterm birth may be more common for pregnant people with severe COVID.
 - c. Pregnant people are more likely to die of COVID than non-pregnant people with COVID who are the same age.
2. **The mRNA COVID vaccines prevent about 95% of COVID infections.**
 - a. As COVID infections go up in our communities, your risk of getting COVID goes up too.
 - b. Getting a vaccine will help prevent you from getting COVID.
3. **The mRNA COVID vaccines cannot give you COVID.**
 - a. These vaccines have no live virus.
 - b. These vaccines do NOT contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant people, to the fetus, or to the breastfed baby.
 - c. Many vaccines are routinely given in pregnancy and are safe (for example: tetanus, diphtheria, and flu).

What are the risks of getting an mRNA COVID vaccine?

1. **These COVID vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnant people.**
 - a. These vaccines were tested in over 70,000 people, and there were no serious side effects related to the vaccine.
 - b. We do not know if the vaccines work as well in pregnant people as they did in non-pregnant people.
 - c. We do not know whether there are unique downsides in pregnancy, like different side effects or an increased risk of miscarriage or fetal abnormalities.
 - d. The Moderna vaccine was tested in female rats to look at its effects on pregnancy. No significant negative effects were found on female fertility or fetal development.
 - e. Some women became pregnant during the vaccine studies. Eighteen of these women were in the vaccine group, and two months later none had miscarried. There were seventeen

Adapted with permission from: University of Massachusetts Medical School – Baystate. (December 28, 2020). [Shared Decision-Making: COVID Vaccination in Pregnancy](#). Retrieved January 7, 2021.



- women in the placebo group who became pregnant, and two months later two of them had had miscarriages. (In general, 10-20% of pregnancies end in miscarriage).
- f. Because these studies are still ongoing, we don't know how the rest of the pregnancy went for these women.

2. People getting the vaccine will probably have some side effects.

- a. Many people had symptoms caused by their immune system's normal response to the vaccine. The most common side effects were.
- injection site reactions like sore arm (~84%)
 - fatigue (~62%)
 - headache (~55%)
 - muscle pain (~38%)
 - chills (~32%)
 - joint pain (~24%)
 - fever (~14%)
- b. Of 100 people who get the vaccine, 1 will get a high fever (over 38.9°C or 102°F). A persistent high fever during the first trimester might increase the risk of fetal abnormalities or miscarriage. The CDC recommends using Tylenol (acetaminophen) during pregnancy if you have a high fever. Another option is to delay your COVID vaccine until after the first trimester.

What do the experts recommend?

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada recommends that pregnant and breastfeeding individuals who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine are offered vaccination as long as there are no other contraindications.

Individuals should be able to make an informed decision following the review of up-to-date information about the vaccines safety and effectiveness, including clear information that there is currently no evidence for pregnant or breastfeeding individuals. A discussion with a health care provider can help the pregnant or breastfeeding individual weigh the risks and benefits of vaccination, to allow the individual to make a decision that is right for them. The individual's personal values and an understanding that the risk of infection or severe illness from COVID-19 is greater than the potential risks of vaccination during pregnancy, or while breastfeeding, should be considered. Individuals planning pregnancy should have a similar risk-benefit discussion with their health care provider, as it is not known yet whether pregnancy should be delayed following vaccination.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) recommends the COVID vaccine be offered to pregnant or breastfeeding individuals if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual, the fetus, or the breastfed baby, and if informed consent includes discussion that there is no evidence on the use of COVID vaccines in this population.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends if the individual has unavoidable high risk of exposure, such as a healthcare worker, vaccination considerations can be discussed with their healthcare provider.

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How do I decide?

Think about your own personal risk. Look at the columns below and think about your risk of getting COVID (left). Think about your safety - are you able to stay safe (right)?

The risks of getting sick from COVID are higher if... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have contact with people outside your home You are 35 years old or older You are overweight You have other medical problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease You are a smoker You are a racial or ethnic minority, or your community has a high rate of COVID infections You are a healthcare worker 	If you are not at higher risk for COVID and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are always able to wear a mask You and the people you live with can socially distance from others for your whole pregnancy Your community does NOT have high or increasing COVID cases You think the vaccine itself will make you very nervous (you are more worried about the unknown risks than about getting COVID) You have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or an ingredient.
If you are at a higher risk of getting COVID, it probably makes sense to get the vaccine	It might make sense for you to wait for more information or until you are no longer pregnant

What about breastfeeding?

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine and the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine report that there is no reason to believe that the vaccine affects the safety of breastmilk. The vaccine does not contain the virus, so there is no risk of infecting your baby. Because mRNA is fragile, it is very unlikely that any part of the vaccine gets into breastmilk. When we have an infection or get a vaccine, our bodies make antibodies to fight the infection. Antibodies can pass into the breastmilk and then to the baby - and may help prevent infections.

The World Health Organization recommends that if a breastfeeding individual is part of a group (such as a healthcare worker) recommended for receiving vaccine, vaccination can be offered. Breastfeeding can continue following vaccination.

In summary:

1. COVID seems to cause more harm in pregnant people than in people of the same age who are not pregnant.
2. The risks of getting an mRNA COVID vaccine during pregnancy are thought to be small, but are not totally known.
3. You should consider your own personal risk of getting COVID. If your personal risk is high, or there are many cases of COVID in your community, it probably makes sense for you to get a vaccine while pregnant.
4. Whether to get a COVID vaccine during pregnancy is your choice.

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