

Questions and Answers for pregnant or breastfeeding women about COVID-19 vaccination

Updated 08 September 2021

Prepared by:



**INSTITUTE OF
OBSTETRICIANS &
GYNAECOLOGISTS**
ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND



**Irish Medicines in
Pregnancy Services**
**THE
ROTUNDA
HOSPITAL**
DUBLIN

**National Immunisation
Advisory Committee
(NIAC)**

Endorsed by:



**National
Women & Infants
Health Programme**

Questions and Answers for pregnant or breastfeeding women about COVID- 19 vaccination

What are the risks to me as a pregnant woman from COVID-19 infection?

Pregnant women are at a similar risk to non-pregnant women of contracting COVID-19. Most pregnant women who are infected with COVID-19 will only experience mild to moderate symptoms and the risk of passing COVID-19 onto their baby is low. However, pregnant women with symptomatic COVID-19 may be more likely to be admitted to hospital, to need care in an ICU, and to die when compared with non-pregnant women. There may be an increased rate of preterm birth and stillbirth among pregnant patients with COVID-19, whether or not they have symptoms. The published literature relates mainly to UK and US experience. We have seen a higher rate of hospitalisation, ICU admission and high dependency care in Ireland and a small number of cases of stillbirth due to placentitis, but thankfully no maternal death from COVID-19 to date.

What is placentitis?

This is a condition that has caused fetal distress and stillbirth in a number of cases of women who had COVID-19. It occurs within 7-21 days of the infection. We are not sure why some pregnant women have suffered from this. Anyone who has a COVID-19 diagnosis in pregnancy should inform their hospital to arrange follow up. Continue to monitor fetal movements and present to your maternity unit if you notice a significant reduction in movement.

We have no evidence that COVID-19 early in pregnancy is a risk to the baby later on in pregnancy.

Are some pregnant women at higher risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19?

A study in the UK found that most pregnant women who became severely ill from COVID-19 were in their third trimester of pregnancy (28 weeks or more). The study also found pregnant women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely than other pregnant women to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19. Pregnant women over the age of 35, those who have a BMI of 30 or more, and those women who have additional medical problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, also appear to be at higher risk of developing severe illness. In Ireland, we have noticed women in the third trimester are more likely to become ill if they get COVID-19 than those in early pregnancy.

What COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for pregnant women?

The COVID-19 vaccines that are recommended are both mRNA vaccines. Two vaccines are available, Comirnaty® (manufactured by Pfizer/BioNTech) and COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna®. Both are mRNA vaccines that do not contain the live virus. mRNA vaccines stimulate the body to produce some of the viral proteins. The body then produces antibodies against the virus. These antibodies block the virus from entering the cells and can prevent disease. You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Are pregnant women able to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Pregnant women are not excluded from getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Neither the European Medicines Agency (EMA) nor the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) list pregnancy as a contraindication. A pregnancy test prior to vaccination is not required. The risk from mRNA vaccines is thought to be very low due to the rapid breakdown of mRNA in the body.

What is the advice for pregnant women in Ireland?

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC), a group of independent experts in Ireland, recommends that pregnant women should be offered mRNA COVID-19 vaccination at any stage of pregnancy following an individual benefit/risk discussion with their obstetric care giver (GP/ Midwife or Obstetrician). Based on this, they can consider getting the vaccine balancing the small unknown risks related to the vaccine against the serious risks associated with COVID-19.

What are the benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of developing COVID-19 and may reduce the spread of the infection. For pregnant women, this will reduce the chance of becoming severely unwell. It may reduce the chance of pregnancy complications, such as preterm birth or placentitis, which are associated with COVID-19 illness.

What is the advice for pregnant women in other countries?

International Recommendations:

European Network of Teratology Information Services (ENTIS)

Vaccination is currently the most effective measure to reduce the risks associated with COVID-19 disease in pregnant women. Current safety data are reassuring, leading to a favourable benefit-risk ratio for COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy.

Read more: [ENTIS Position Statement; COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy and lactation](#)

France

A mRNA COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for all pregnant women.

Italy

COVID-19 vaccination should be considered for pregnant women at high risk of exposure or with underlying conditions predisposing them to poor outcomes.

Netherlands

All pregnant women are now advised to be vaccinated when they are invited for vaccination, preferably with an mRNA vaccine.

UK

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advises that all pregnant women should have access to COVID-19 vaccination, preferably mRNA vaccines where available.

Israel

COVID-19 vaccine is available to women at any stage of pregnancy who wish to receive it, although first-trimester vaccination is only recommended for women in risk groups.

USA

All pregnant women are advised to avail of COVID-19 vaccination with no gestational limits. The CDC advises that pregnant women can choose to become vaccinated with any of the authorised vaccines (Comirnaty® Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna® or COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen®).

Canada

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends that a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine may be offered to pregnant individuals in the authorized age group if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual and the fetus.

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada recommends prioritisation of women who are more than 20 weeks pregnant for vaccination. They also recommend that all pregnant women should be eligible for vaccination.

Is there a specific time in pregnancy to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC), a group of independent experts in Ireland, recommends that pregnant women should be offered mRNA COVID-19 vaccination at any stage of pregnancy following an individual benefit/risk discussion with their obstetric care giver (GP/ Midwife or Obstetrician).

The Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland recommend two doses of mRNA COVID -19 vaccine at least 28 days apart. This is the same for both Comirnaty® and COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna®.

What are the potential side effects?

Common side effects of any of the vaccines include fatigue, headache, sore arm, fever and muscle or joint pains. There is no evidence pregnant women experience more of these side effects than non-pregnant women. These symptoms are more common after the second dose. Fever after vaccines usually starts within 24 hours after vaccination, is generally mild (<39°C), and usually resolves within 2 days without treatment. Fever after vaccination can be managed with paracetamol. **Do not take ibuprofen or aspirin.** Remember if you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reasons - don't assume it's the vaccine and seek medical advice if needed.

I have had my Anti -D recently. Can I still get the vaccine?

Yes. There is no interval that you have to wait for the vaccine.

I have an underlying condition that means I am immunocompromised should I get the vaccine?

Immunocompromised people are advised to get the vaccine. Pregnant women in these groups are also advised to get the vaccine as well as observing public health measures.

Are there risks to the fetus from vaccinating the mother?

There is limited data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy and lactation. The COVID-19 vaccines are not expected to have any effect on the fetus. These are not live vaccines, so cannot infect either mother or fetus. The mRNA is rapidly broken down in the body. It cannot become part of your or your baby's DNA.

Animal studies of the mRNA vaccines did not show any potential risks. There is no known plausible biological mechanism which would affect the fetus or fertility. Over 124,000 COVID-19 vaccines have been given in pregnancy in the US as of 17/05/2021. Approximately 70,000 have received Comirnaty® Pfizer/BioNTech mRNA vaccine in Israel. So far, all information shows pregnancy complications rates similar to what would normally be expected. Most (73%) reports to Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) among pregnant women involved non pregnancy-specific adverse events (e.g. local reactions). No unexpected pregnancy or infant outcomes have been observed related to COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy.

When will we have more evidence about COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy?

Pregnant women were not intentionally recruited to the initial trials. Trials of COVID-19 vaccines are now taking place in pregnant women. Also, many pregnant and breastfeeding women have chosen to get the vaccine in other countries, so we will have a lot more information over the coming months.

Can other vaccines, such as pertussis (whooping cough), be given at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. NIAC recommends that COVID-19 vaccines and any other vaccines can be given at the same time or at any interval. The vaccines should be given in different limbs as there may be more local side effects.

I had a first dose of Vaxzevria® (formerly COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca®), what about my second dose?

While Vaxzevria® is not being routinely given to those under 50, those who have had one dose already should have the second dose 12 weeks later as scheduled. This is because the small risk of very unusual blood clots with low platelets appears to be less after the second dose.

Can I breastfeed if I got the vaccine while I was pregnant?

Yes. If you were vaccinated while pregnant, antibodies against COVID-19 disease may pass into the breastmilk and give some protection to your baby. This has now been shown in published papers.

Can I get the vaccine if I am breastfeeding, and if so, can I continue to breastfeed?

Yes. You can get the vaccine at any stage after your baby is born. There is little data on breastfeeding but no theoretical risk from these vaccines. If remnants get into breastmilk they get digested in the baby's stomach.

Do I need to leave any interval before getting pregnant?

You do not need to leave any interval after having the COVID-19 vaccine and becoming pregnant. If you become pregnant following the first dose, there is no requirement to delay the second dose.

Do I need to leave any interval before starting IVF treatment?

You do not need to leave any interval after having the COVID-19 vaccine and starting IVF treatment.

Does COVID-19 vaccine have any impact on fertility?

There is no evidence the vaccine affects fertility. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines cannot become part of your or your baby's DNA. We do not advise deferring a vaccine offer because of plans to have a family.

Do the vaccines have any impact on the menstrual cycle?

There is no evidence the vaccine has any link to irregular menstrual cycles.

What if I have had COVID-19 in the last 6 months?

If you have already had COVID-19 you should still consider getting the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Although previous COVID-19 infection does provide some protection, vaccination is still recommended. If you have had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 6 months, you will only need one dose of vaccine.

Where you can find out more

NIAC recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy

<https://rcpi-live-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210902-amended-Recommendations-re-pregnancy-FINAL.pdf>

Information about COVID-19:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/>

COVID-19 vaccines | HSE:

<https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/>

National Immunisation Office:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/covid19vaccineinfo4hps/>

