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COVID vaccination in pregnancy and breastfeeding

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Strengthening Midwifery Globally



Overview

- COVID-19 infection and pregnancy
- COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy



COVID-19 and pregnancy

- Pregnant women with COVID-19 have a higher risk of certain complications compared to non-pregnant women with COVID-19 of the same age:
 - increased risk (**about 5 times higher**) of needing admission to hospital.
 - increased risk (**about 2-3 times higher**) of needing admission to ICU
 - increased risk (**about 3 times higher**) of needing invasive ventilation
- Increased risk of pre-eclampsia (8% vs 4.4%) - higher in symptomatic women

- COVID-19 during pregnancy also increases complications for the baby:
 - slightly increased risk (**about 1.5 times higher**) of being born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
 - increased risk (**about 3 times higher**) of needing admission to a hospital NICU
 - Increased risk of stillbirth in some studies
- Some of these risks may be due to:
 - A sick mother who needs to give birth early
 - Women unable access care-individual and service level

- Pregnant women may have more severe illness from COVID-19 compared to pregnant women without these conditions.
- The conditions are:
 - Being older than 35 years
 - Being overweight or obese (body mass index above 30 kg/m²)
 - Having pre-existing (pre-pregnancy) high blood pressure
 - Having pre-existing (pre-pregnancy) diabetes (type 1 or type 2)
- Other conditions:
 - Living or working in a community with high numbers of COVID-19 cases
 - Living or working in a community with low levels of COVID-19 vaccination
 - Working in places where it is difficult or not possible to keep at least 6 feet apart from people who might be sick

Vaccination in pregnancy

- **Vaccination for COVID-19 in pregnancy is recommended**
- The vaccines are safe and effective
- The vaccines do not contain live virus – they just contain a recipe to make your body create antibodies so you can fight COVID-19
- *"When women take the vaccine, they don't just create antibodies for themselves - they also transmit it to their children or their unborn child so they get that layer of protection"*
 - Head of Fiji's vaccination taskforce, Dr Rachel Devi



COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy – WHO recommendation

- WHO recommends the use of the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnant women when the benefits of vaccination to the pregnant woman outweigh the potential risks
- WHO does not recommend pregnancy testing prior to vaccination
- WHO does not recommend delaying pregnancy or terminating pregnancy because of vaccination
- COVID-19 vaccines will not cause fertility problems in women or men

You have access to different vaccines across the Pacific

COVID-19 vaccines

Use in pregnancy

Pfizer



Moderna



Astra-Zeneca



**Sinovac-
CoronaVac**



Side effects

- Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects
- These are usually mild and do not last long – and are often less in pregnancy
- Very common side effects 1-2 days after include: pain or tenderness in your arm where you had your injection, feeling tired and headaches, aches and chills.
- You may also have flu like symptoms and experiences episodes of shivering or shaking for a day or two
- If you develop a fever, you can rest and take paracetamol, which is safe in pregnancy.

Rare side effect with AZ

- **Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)**
- TTS is currently estimated to affect 3 in 100,000 people
- Death linked to the AZ vaccine in Australia equals approximately 1 in a million
- 4 days to 4 weeks after vaccination
- a new, severe headache which is not helped by usual painkillers or is getting worse and may be accompanied by:
 - blurred vision, nausea and vomiting
 - difficulty with speech
 - weakness, drowsiness or seizures
- new, unexplained pinprick bruising or bleeding
- shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling or persistent abdominal pain

Situation in countries with Astra-Zeneca vaccine – Papua New Guinea context

- The PNG O&G Society advised the government advisory group in July to make COVID-19 (AZ) vaccine permissible for all pregnant and lactating women
- Last week, the PNG O&G Society recommended COVID-19 vaccination (AZ) for all pregnant women
- A vaccination centre in the ANC at PMGH has been set up so that women can get the vaccine as part of their ANC
 - Every woman is being personally counselled now in PMGH ANC that it is advisable for them to receive COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy because of the increased risk of maternal morbidity and death in the third trimester
- There have been 4 maternal deaths at PMGH associated with severe COVID complications since February this year

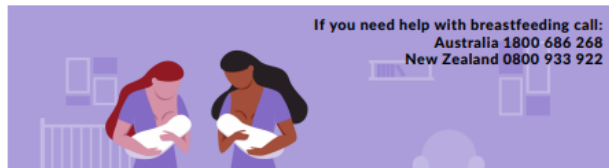
Can breastfeeding women be vaccinated?

- **YES**
- It is safe for breastfeeding women to get the COVID-19 vaccine
- **The COVID-19 vaccine itself does not go into breastmilk – only the antibodies that are protective**
- No need to delay or stop breastfeeding when getting vaccinated



COVID-19 vaccine and breastfeeding

At this time the Australian and New Zealand Governments support the use of an approved COVID-19 vaccination in breastfeeding women. Breastfeeding women do not need to stop breastfeeding to receive the vaccine.



There is no evidence of additional risks to breastfeeding women or their children from an approved COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia and New Zealand do not contain a live virus.

Prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccination it is important that breastfeeding women discuss the COVID-19 immunisation with their health professional.

Research shows that antibodies made by a mother's body after having COVID-19 are available to her child via her breastmilk.

Links to further information:
www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-covid-19-vaccination-decision-guide-for-women-who-are-pregnant-breastfeeding-or-planning-pregnancy
www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-getting-vaccine/covid-19-who-can-get-vaccine#pregnant
[www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccines-safety](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines-safety)
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7586930/

For more information visit: Australia | www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/covid-19
New Zealand | www.babyfriendly.org.nz/resource/finding-support/



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Breastfeeding Helpline
1800 mum 2 mum
1800 686 268



The Royal Australian
and New Zealand
College of Obstetricians
and Gynaecologists
Excellence in Women's Health

The National Breastfeeding Helpline is supported by funding from the Australian Government.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine affect fertility?

- **NO**
- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine will not affect fertility.
- Women trying to conceive may be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccines
- There is no reason to delay pregnancy after completing the vaccine series.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine affect pregnant women's immune systems?

- **YES**
- The vaccine activates the immune system to help patients fight the viral infection.
- That is what is needed



Is there a risk of miscarriage after being vaccinated?

- **NO**
- Results from published studies suggest that there is no increased risk of miscarriage in women who receive COVID-19 vaccines

Is there a risk to the baby?

- Antibodies from the COVID-19 vaccine cross the placenta
 - **The COVID-19 vaccine does not cross the placenta – only the antibodies that are protective**
- Antibodies may provide the baby with some protection against COVID-19 for the first few months of life
- COVID-19 does not cause abnormalities in the baby



Can I get COVID-19 from the coronavirus vaccine?

- **NO**
- You cannot catch COVID-19 from the currently available vaccines
- You may experience mild, temporary side effects, but this is an indication of the immune response to the vaccination, not COVID-19.

Should all midwives get vaccinated?

- **YES**
- Protect yourself from getting sick from COVID-19
- Protect the woman you care for – less likely to transmit if vaccinated
- Protect people in the hospital – especially those who have other conditions
- Protect your family and the community
- Be a role model in your community

What can midwives do?



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Talking with pregnant women – use every opportunity

- **ASK**
 - Where is she up to in her decision making?
 - What does she know already? What else does she need to know?
- **ACKNOWLEDGE**
 - It is normal to be concerned or uncertain
- **ADVISE**
 - Getting vaccinated in pregnancy is safe and important – protect yourself, your family and your community
- **ASSIST**
 - Help her to find and book in to the vaccination centre

WHO SHOULD HAVE THE CONVERSATION?

- It's our job and part of our responsibility as midwives
- Don't wait for someone else to have the conversation
- We can and will make a difference
- Remember - we regularly discuss vaccination against influenza, pertussis and hepatitis B. COVID-19 vaccination is to be routinely offered and recommended.

Australian College of Midwives e-learning course

- Free online course on COVID-19 vaccination
- Available for all health professionals
- <http://acmcovid19info.org/>