

Patient FAQs

COVID-19 Vaccination During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

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What is a vaccine?

Vaccines are medications that stimulate the body to provide immunity against infectious diseases. Vaccines are commonly administered through needle injections, but some are available to take by mouth or by spray through the nose. Different vaccines work in different ways to provide immunity against potentially dangerous diseases.

Are vaccines safe in pregnancy?

Many vaccines are not only safe but are a part of recommended care for women before, during, and after their pregnancy to keep them and their babies healthy. There are over 100 vaccines and many of them, such as the yearly flu vaccine, are recommended and safe during pregnancy. Other vaccines, particularly those that contain live viruses such as Varicella should not be taken during pregnancy. If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant, ask your doctor which vaccines you should take or are safe for you to take.

What is the risk of coronavirus infection in pregnancy?

According to the CDC, pregnancy increases the risk of severe disease in patients with coronavirus infection. Pregnant women are three times more likely to need admission to an Intensive Care Unit, two to three times more likely require a breathing tube or other life saving measures, and have a slightly increased risk of death compared to non-pregnant patients. Pregnant patients who have conditions such as obesity, diabetes or cardiac disease may have even further increased risks from coronavirus infection.

How does the currently available COVID-19 vaccine work?

The COVID-19 vaccine is a new type of vaccine called an mRNA vaccine. mRNA vaccines work by using genetic material called mRNA which teaches our cells how to make proteins and antibodies that trigger a protective response inside our bodies. These antibodies protect us from infection if we come into contact with the real virus. While mRNA viruses contain genetic material, data suggests that mRNA vaccines do not cause genetic changes in either the pregnant mother or her developing baby. The vaccine is rapidly cleared from the body after injection and is gone from the body within days.

The currently available vaccine is given in two doses and the vaccine is considered effective one to two weeks following the second dose. When administered this way, the vaccination is 95% effective.

Should I choose to receive the coronavirus vaccine if I am pregnant?

- Pregnant and lactating women were kept out of COVID-19 vaccination studies and as a result there is not data on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnant populations. Based on the

how these vaccines work it is expected that the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine will be the same for pregnant and non-pregnant individuals. There is no evidence that the vaccine can cause genetic changes in the patient or her developing fetus. The risk to the developing fetus while purely theoretical is thought to be low and early studies have been reassuring.

- The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) and the Society of Maternal Fetal Medicine (SMFM) are organizations that set guidelines for prenatal care in the United States. Both groups recommend that pregnant and breastfeeding people be able to choose to receive the COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccination should occur after weighing the potential benefits and unknown risks to vaccination. Pregnant patients who belong to high-risk groups such as health care workers and workers in essential and critical industries should be included among those who have early access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Pregnant patients with high-risk health conditions may be in the next group considered for vaccination.
- ACOG recommends that you weigh the level of the virus in your community, your personal risk for exposure, your personal risk for developing severe disease if you contract the coronavirus, and what is known about the risks and benefits of the vaccine to which you have access.
- A discussion with your prenatal care provider may be helpful in your decision. ACOG recommends that this not be required in order to receive the vaccine.
- Expected side effects are the same for pregnant and non-pregnant people. Muscle aches, headache and fever can be treated with acetaminophen in pregnancy. Since fever can be dangerous to the fetus it is recommended to treat fever with acetaminophen if fever occurs.
- Pregnant patients who decline vaccination should be supported in their decision.

Should I receive the coronavirus vaccine if I am breastfeeding?

There is no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in breastfeeding or the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant, but mRNA vaccines are not are not thought to pose a significant risk to the breastfed infant. SMFM recommends the vaccination for breastfeeding persons.

There is no need for patients who receive a COVID-19 vaccine to avoid starting to breastfeed or to stop breastfeeding.

What if I am trying to become pregnant?

ACOG recommends vaccination of people who are actively trying to become pregnant or are contemplating pregnancy if they are members of the vaccine priority groups mentioned above. It is not necessary to delay pregnancy after completing both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

It is not necessary to have a pregnancy test prior to receiving the vaccination.