Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe for pregnant women?

There are two COVID-19 vaccines currently approved by the TGA for use in Australia - Pfizer Comirnaty and COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca. There are very limited data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for pregnant or lactating women. The Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine has been given a Pregnancy Category B1 and the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca has a Pregnancy Category B2 by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) currently recommends pregnant women do not routinely receive the vaccine during pregnancy, however based on the knowledge and experience of use of other similar vaccines it is unlikely these vaccines pose a risk to a pregnant woman or fetus.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has developed a COVID-19 vaccination decision guide which explores in detail the recommendations regarding use of either vaccine in women who are pregnant on a risk assessment basis, and states there are no theoretical concerns regarding the safety of Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines in these groups.

If a pregnant woman is considered high risk either because of immunosuppression or comorbidities, or when the potential benefits of a vaccine may outweigh any potential risks to the mother and/or baby, the opportunity for vaccination should be considered.

The following groups of pregnant or lactating women should be offered COVID-19 vaccination:

1. Those with high risk medical conditions who have greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19:
   - Significant pre-existing medical conditions (e.g. diabetes)
   - Solid organ transplant recipients
   - Chronic respiratory conditions (e.g. cystic fibrosis, severe asthma)
   - Homozygous sickle cell disease
   - Receiving immunosuppression therapies (enough to significantly increase risk of infection)
   - Dialysis or advanced chronic kidney disease
   - Congenital or acquired heart disease
   - Where the treating doctor or midwife identifies a woman may be at higher risk of severe illness if you develop COVID-19.

2. Health or other frontline workers who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 in:
   - areas of significantly increased risk of exposure to COVID-19
   - settings of high community transmission
   - healthcare workers with direct COVID-19 patient contact.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe for lactating women?
If you are breastfeeding, you can receive either the Pfizer or the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine at any time. You do not need to stop breastfeeding before or after vaccination. Nearly all vaccines are considered safe for use in lactating women and the advice of Australian and international bodies is that it is safe to be vaccinated whilst lactating.

The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) state there is little plausibility that the vaccine will cause harm, and that antibodies to SARS-CoV2 in breast milk may protect a breastfeeding baby from COVID-19.

The CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices reports that with the exception of smallpox and yellow fever, vaccines during lactation do not affect the safety of breastfeeding for the mother or her child.

ATAGI currently supports vaccination of lactating women with Comirnaty and AstraZeneca.

Planning a pregnancy and fertility

Both ATAGI and RANZCOG advises there is no evidence to suggest women who become pregnant after receiving the vaccines are at increased risk of an adverse pregnancy outcome. Pregnancy or fertility treatment need not be delayed after receiving the vaccines.

Making a decision on vaccination

Women are encouraged to discuss their individual circumstances with their doctor or midwife to help make an informed decision about whether to have the vaccines or not.

Please note: influenza and pertussis vaccinations continue to be recommended during pregnancy. These vaccines can be administered in addition to the COVID-19 vaccines by following the recommended dosing schedule.

For further information visit the information for healthcare workers website or the Queensland Health website.

Taking care of your mental health and wellbeing

If you are a pregnant or lactating healthcare worker, COVID-19 may affect your mental wellbeing and place added stress on relationships and at work. During pregnancy, most women experience a range of emotions. It’s normal to feel some worry during pregnancy and when having a baby. If you feel worrying thoughts are becoming a regular part of life, it can help to talk about any concerns with your doctor, midwife, partner or a close friend.

It is important to take care of yourself and share any concerns. Remember, the COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory. Talking through your options, the potential risks and benefits, may help in making an informed decision about whether to vaccinate.

Recommended reading

ATAGI - COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy

RANZCOG: Covid-19 Vaccination in Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

CDC Vaccination Consideration for People who are Pregnant or Breastfeeding

RCOG and RCM: Covid-19 Vaccination Fact Sheet

Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine

TGA product information - Pfizer

TGA product information - AstraZeneca