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# COVID Vaccine Advice if You Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued emergency use authorization for three vaccines to prevent COVID-19:

- The two-dose Pfizer vaccine for people 16 years and older
- The two-dose Moderna vaccine for people 18 years and older
- The one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine for people 18 years and older (you may also see this vaccine referred to as the “Janssen vaccine”)

Persons who are pregnant and breastfeeding may also choose to be vaccinated. For those receiving the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the second dose is given 21 days (Pfizer) and 28 days (Moderna) after the first dose.<sup>1</sup> The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is only one dose.<sup>2</sup>

[Anyone can get the COVID vaccines](#) free of charge regardless of immigration status or whether they have insurance. You may be asked for your social security number, but it is NOT required to get vaccinated.

## Information for Pregnant Individuals

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant and are thinking about getting vaccinated, talk with your health care professional about the vaccines' risks and benefits. During this conversation, you can decide what is best for you based on your risk of getting COVID-19, your risk of getting severe disease if you become infected with COVID-19, and general discussion about the risks and benefits of getting the vaccine.

To help with your decision, you and your healthcare professional should answer the following key questions:

### What are the known risks of getting the COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy?

- Pregnant women were not included in the clinical trials of the vaccine. A few people who received the vaccines in the clinical trials did get pregnant. There have been no reports of any problems with these pregnancies, and they are continuing to be monitored.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with other federal partners, are monitoring people who have been vaccinated for serious side effects. So far, more than 100,000 pregnant people who have been vaccinated have reported to the CDC about how the vaccine has affected them. No unexpected pregnancy or fetal problems have occurred. You can participate in this effort by enrolling in [V-Safe After Vaccination Health Checker](#) (more information on this program is given below).
- A safe vaccine is generally considered one in which the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh the risks. The current vaccines are not live vaccines. There is only a very small chance that they cross the placenta, so it's unlikely that they even reach the fetus, although we don't know this for sure. There is no evidence that the vaccines affect future fertility. The only people who should NOT get vaccinated are those who have had a severe allergic reaction to vaccines in the past or any vaccine ingredients.
- Side effects may occur in the first 3 days after getting vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> These include mild to moderate fever, headache, and muscle aches. Side effects may be worse after the second dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.<sup>3,4</sup> Fever should be avoided during pregnancy, especially in the first trimester. Those who develop fever after vaccination can take acetaminophen (Tylenol). This medication is safe to use during pregnancy and does not affect how the vaccine works.

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

- The vaccines can help protect you from getting COVID-19. With the two-dose vaccines, you must get both doses for maximum effectiveness. It's not yet known whether vaccination prevents passing the virus to others if you do get COVID-19 or how long protection lasts. At this time, vaccinated people still need to wear masks and practice social distancing.
- Another potential benefit is that getting the vaccine while pregnant may help you pass anti-COVID-19 antibodies to your baby. In a recent study of vaccinated moms, antibodies were found in the umbilical cord blood of babies and in the mother's breastmilk.<sup>5</sup> This means that both you and your baby are protected against COVID-19.

#### What are the known risks of getting COVID-19 during pregnancy?

About 1 to 3 per 1,000 pregnant women with COVID-19 will develop severe disease. Compared with those who aren't pregnant, pregnant people infected by the COVID-19 virus:

- Are 3 times more likely to need ICU care
- Are 2 to 3 times more likely to need advanced life support and a breathing tube
- Have a small increased risk of dying due to COVID-19

They may also be at increased risk of stillbirth and preterm birth.<sup>6-8</sup>

#### What is my risk of getting COVID-19?

Your risk of getting COVID-19 depends on the chance that you will come into contact with another infected person. The risk may be higher if you live in a community where there is a lot of COVID-19 infection or work in healthcare or another high-contact setting.

## What is my risk for severe complications if I get COVID-19?

Data show that older pregnant women; those with preexisting health conditions, such as a body mass index higher than 35 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, diabetes, and heart disorders; and Black or Latinx women have an especially increased risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.<sup>6-8</sup>

After you and your healthcare provider discuss the above questions, you can make an informed decision about whether to get vaccinated. If you still have questions about the vaccines or need more information, ask your health care provider or go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#).

## An Update on the Johnson & Johnson Vaccine

Last month, the FDA and CDC called for a brief pause to use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. They did so after reports of a severe side effect in a very small number of women younger than age 50 following vaccination. This side effect, called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), causes blood clots (thrombosis) combined with low levels of platelets (thrombocytopenia).

TTS following the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is extremely rare. At the time of this update, it has occurred in only 7 people per 1 million Johnson & Johnson shots given. According to the CDC, being on hormonal birth control (the pill, patch, or ring), pregnancy, breastfeeding, or being recently pregnant does not make you more likely to develop TTS after getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The pause was lifted on April 23, 2021, after the FDA and CDC determined that the known benefits of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine far outweigh the risks. Health care professionals have been alerted to the possibility of this side effect in people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

National organizations continue to recommend COVID-19 vaccination with any of the vaccines for pregnant women. All women younger than age 50 years, whether pregnant, breastfeeding, or not, should be aware of the very rare risk of TTS after getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines don't have this risk. If you get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, seek medical help right away if you develop any of the following symptoms within 3 weeks of getting your shot:

- Severe or persistent headaches or blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Leg swelling
- Persistent abdominal pain
- Easy bruising or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the injection site

Experts continue to collect health and safety information from pregnant people who have been vaccinated. If you have questions about vaccination during pregnancy, visit the [CDC website](#) or talk to your health care professional.

## Information for Breastfeeding/Lactating Individuals

The COVID-19 vaccines are being offered to people who are breastfeeding/lactating. Although lactating individuals were not allowed in the clinical trials, experience with other vaccines is reassuring. You don't have to delay or stop breastfeeding just because you get vaccinated.

## Choosing Vaccination...Or Not

You can choose to get vaccinated at any time during pregnancy. If you do get vaccinated, the CDC is committed to monitoring the vaccine's safety for all individuals. Your health professional will give you information about enrolling in the [v-safe after vaccination health checker](#) (see the box below).

If you choose not to get the vaccine while pregnant, you can get it after you have your baby. Talk to your health care provider about a plan to get the vaccine after pregnancy.

No matter what you decide, it is important that you continue to follow COVID-19 infection prevention steps such as wearing a mask, washing your hands frequently, and maintaining physical distancing of at least 6 feet.

### What Happens When You Enroll in V-Safe?

The [v-safe after vaccination health checker](#) program lets the CDC check in with you after your vaccination. At sign-up, you can indicate that you are pregnant. Once you do that, expect the following:

- Someone will call you from the CDC (which may be an Atlanta, GA phone number) to ask initial questions and get more information.
- You may be asked to enroll in the vaccine pregnancy registry, which is collecting information about any effects of the vaccine during pregnancy. This is a great way to help scientists monitor the vaccine's safety and effectiveness.

## References

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