

Ministry of Health

# COVID-19 Vaccination: Special Populations

## Vaccination in Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Patient Decision-Making Tool

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This guidance document is not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or legal advice.

- Please check the Ministry of Health (MOH) [COVID-19](#) website regularly for updates to this document, mental health resources, and other information.
- Please check the [Directives, Memorandums and Other Resources](#) page regularly for the most up to date directives.

**This is an information tool that can be used by patients to help them make an informed decision about the COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy and breastfeeding.**

# I am pregnant or breastfeeding. Should I get the COVID-19 Vaccine?

This information is about the *Pfizer* and *Moderna* mRNA COVID-19 vaccines.

## It is YOUR choice.

For many people, getting a COVID-19 vaccine is the safest choice.

Clinical trials for these vaccines did not include people who were pregnant or breastfeeding. The information below will help you make an informed choice about if you should get the COVID-19 vaccine.

### YOUR OPTIONS

1



Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available to you.

2



Wait until there is more information about the vaccines in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

3



Wait until your pregnancy and/or breastfeeding is complete.

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

**The COVID-19 vaccines are 94% to 95% effective**

(For example, for every 100 people who get the vaccine, 94 to 95 of them will not get a COVID-19 infection).

- As the number of COVID-19 cases goes up, your risk of getting COVID-19 goes up as well.
- COVID-19 vaccines work by giving our body something that looks like the virus. This teaches our immune system to recognize and fight the virus if we come into contact with it later.

**The COVID-19 vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>**

- These vaccines do not contain live virus.
- Many vaccines are routinely given in pregnancy and are safe. For example, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis and flu vaccines can be given during pregnancy. Offering these vaccines during pregnancy is considered the standard of care in Canada. These vaccines can protect against infectious diseases during pregnancy.<sup>13</sup>

**Getting the vaccine can help prevent complications or bad outcomes.**

- Most pregnant people have mild COVID-19. A small portion of pregnant people may have moderate to severe COVID-19 symptoms. There is a greater chance that pregnant people will require hospital care and possible admission to the intensive care unit.<sup>1,6,7</sup>
- Giving birth too early in pregnancy (preterm birth) may be more common in pregnant people with severe COVID-19.<sup>1,2</sup>

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

### Clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines did not include pregnant people.

- It is not known if pregnant people are at an increased risk of side effects, such as pregnancy loss (miscarriage). It is also not known if their baby is at an increased risk for development issues (abnormalities). However, based on what we know about how the mRNA vaccine works, these are not expected to happen
- It is not known if the vaccines work as well in pregnant people as they do in non-pregnant people.
- These vaccines were tested in a large group of people (over 40,000) and so far no serious side effects have been found.
- As with any vaccine, allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, are rare but can occur. If you have allergies to medications, talk to a health-care provider.
- A few people got pregnant during the vaccine trials. So far, their results are similar to non-pregnant people in the trial.

### Anyone getting the vaccine may have some side effects. <sup>6</sup>

- As with other vaccines, some people may develop mild side effects in the days after immunization. This is caused by their immune system's normal response to the vaccine. These side effects are generally not serious and go away on their own.<sup>5</sup>
- Out of 100 people who get the vaccine, one will get a high fever (over 39°C or 102°F). Talk to your doctor or midwife if you develop a fever, or any side effects that worry you or that last more than 3 days, so they can give you advice. A high fever that lasts too long during the first three months of pregnancy (first trimester) may increase the risk of miscarriage or abnormalities to the baby. An option is to wait until after the first trimester to get your COVID-19 vaccine.

#### Common Side Effects

(may affect more than 1 in 10 people)



- Pain at injection site
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Headache
- Muscle Pain
- Fever

#### Uncommon Side Effects

(may affect up to 1 in 100 people)



Enlarged lymph nodes

## What do the experts recommend?

The *National Advisory Committee on Immunization* recommends that the COVID-19 vaccine may be offered to pregnant or breastfeeding people if the benefits outweigh the risks for the person and their baby. The person must be told that COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials have not been done in this population.<sup>11</sup>

The *Ontario Society of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists* and *The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada*, also advise that pregnant people should be given the chance to make an informed choice to get the COVID-19 vaccine. They should understand the risks of getting the COVID-19 infection and the risks of getting the vaccine. Speak to your doctor or midwife to learn if the benefits of getting the vaccine outweigh the risks for you. <sup>9,10</sup>

## What else should I think about to help me decide?

1

Make sure you understand as much as you can about COVID-19 and the vaccine.

2

### Think about your own personal risk.

Look at the columns below and think about your risk of getting COVID-19 and having severe illness from COVID-19.

Think about your safety and if you are able to stay safe.

Would getting the vaccine help you stay safer?



### The risk of getting COVID-19 is higher if:

- You have regular contact with people outside your home
- You live in a community with a lot of COVID-19 infections
- You live in a crowded housing situation (such as a shelter)
- You work in a high-risk environment (e.g. front-line worker or health-care worker).

### The risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 in pregnancy is higher if:

- You are overweight
- You have medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, a compromised immune system, kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease or asthma
- You are a smoker
- You are 35 years of age or older
- You are in the last three months (third trimester) of your pregnancy



If you are at a higher risk of getting COVID-19, it may make sense to get the vaccine.<sup>8,7,12</sup>

### If you are not at higher risk for COVID-19 and:

- You are able to wear a mask when needed
- Getting the vaccine will make you nervous (you are more worried about the risks of getting the vaccine than about getting a COVID-19 infection)
- Your community does NOT have a lot of COVID-19 cases
- You and the people you live with can physically distance from others



It may make sense for you to wait for more information or talk to your doctor or midwife.

## What about breastfeeding?

Clinical trials for the vaccine did not include people who were breastfeeding. Even though there is no data about safety in breastfeeding, Canadian experts believe that because the vaccines do not contain live virus, it is likely safe to breastfeed babies.<sup>10,11</sup> It is also not known yet whether getting the vaccine will mean passing protective immunity (antibodies) to your baby through breastfeeding<sup>14</sup>

## What if I get pregnant after getting the vaccine?



If you are pregnant or become pregnant soon after getting the first dose of the vaccine you will have to decide if you should get the second dose. The decision should be made by looking at the risks of not being completely vaccinated during pregnancy vs. the risks of receiving the vaccine during pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

## What if I am planning a pregnancy?

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada recommends that people who are planning on becoming pregnant get both doses of the vaccine ahead of pregnancy (where possible). It is not known if a person should delay getting pregnant after getting the vaccine. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of getting the vaccine if you are planning a pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

## Summary

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy is your choice.

COVID-19 may cause more severe illness in pregnant people than in people of the same age who are not pregnant.

The COVID-19 vaccine protects against infection and the risks associated with getting the COVID-19 vaccine are likely similar if you are pregnant or not, but there is not much information on its use in pregnancy yet.

You should consider your own personal risks vs. benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccine.



### Do you have more questions?

**Speak to your doctor or midwife for more information.**

## Your feedback is important to us!

Please complete [a survey online](#) or by scanning the QR code.



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