



Should I get the COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy?

Staying up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines can help protect you and your baby from serious illness and complications from COVID-19 infection. You can get a COVID-19 vaccine at any stage in pregnancy, whenever your next recommended dose is due.



MORE INFO

See skai.org.au for more information on COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy.



What are the recommendations and why do they change?

Adults in Australia, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, are advised to stay up to date with all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses for their age and level of risk from COVID infection. You may be eligible for another dose if it has been more than six months since your last dose, or since you were infected with COVID-19.

Recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines are made by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). ATAGI makes its recommendations based on the latest available data about disease risk, hospitalisation rates and infection rates, and vaccine safety and effectiveness data from around the world.



What are the risks of COVID-19 for my baby?

Pregnant women with COVID-19 are 1.5 times more likely to give birth prematurely, experience stillbirth, and encounter other pregnancy issues than pregnant women without COVID-19. Babies born to women who catch COVID-19 while pregnant are three times more likely to have to be admitted to a neonatal unit after birth.^{1,2}



What are the risks of COVID-19 for pregnant women?

Pregnant women with COVID-19 are more likely than other adults to become seriously

unwell. Compared with non-pregnant women of the same age, they are:

- Five times more likely to need hospital admission
- Two to three times more likely to need admission to an intensive care unit
- Three times more likely to need ventilation support to breathe.



How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

The COVID-19 vaccines recommended for pregnant women in Australia are mRNA vaccines. They work by providing instructions to our cells to make the COVID-19 spike protein. The body then develops antibodies to the spike protein which circulate in the bloodstream ready to fight COVID-19 infection if that occurs. Both the mRNA in the vaccine and the spike protein are destroyed by the body within a few days to a week.

Getting vaccinated reduces your risk of pregnancy complications and gives your baby some protection from COVID-19 after they're born, when they're too young to get the vaccine themselves.

The mRNA in the vaccine does not alter your DNA or cause any genetic changes, and it cannot be passed on to your baby through the placenta or through breastmilk. Only the antibodies that provide protection against COVID-19 infection are passed on to your baby.

Continues ►



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Is the vaccine safe for me and my baby?

The COVID-19 vaccine has been shown to be safe for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and their babies. Vaccination does not increase the risk of pregnancy complications, or health risks for your baby. In particular, there is no difference in the rate of stillbirth, premature delivery, congenital anomalies and small-for-gestational-age infants between women who have the COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy, and those who do not.²



How does the COVID-19 vaccine affect breastmilk and breastfeeding?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for breastfeeding mothers and their babies. The vaccines do not affect breastmilk production. The antibodies produced by the mother's immune system after vaccination can be passed to the baby through breastmilk, providing some protection against COVID-19. No part of the vaccine itself, including the mRNA, can be passed to the baby through breastmilk.



Does the COVID-19 vaccine affect future fertility?

No, many studies have shown that receiving the COVID-19 vaccine does not affect fertility for men or women.



How will I react to the vaccine?

Pregnant women are not more likely to experience side effects to COVID-19 vaccination compared to people who are not pregnant. The most common side effects of vaccination

are injection site reactions, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, fever, chills and joint pain.

A very small number of people have a severe allergic reaction to vaccines, called 'anaphylaxis'. Anaphylaxis can lead to swelling, hives, breathing difficulties, lowered blood pressure, and in severe cases, shock. Anaphylactic reactions to COVID-19 vaccination occur in about two to five people in every one million people. Midwives, nurses and GPs are trained to respond to anaphylactic reactions with quick delivery of adrenaline.

If you have any worries about how you feel after your vaccination, you can get help from your doctor, or your nearest emergency department, or by calling Health Direct on 1800 022 222. ■

References

References used in the development of this resource can be seen at <https://skai.org.au/should-i-get-covid-19-vaccination-during-pregnancy>