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This resource reflects the information available as of the date of issue. It is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your doctor or midwife if you have any questions about this resource.

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

It is YOUR choice.

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

Pregnant and breastfeeding people were not included in initial clinical trials of these vaccines. However, we now have more than a year of experience showing outcomes of these people and their babies. The information below will help you make an informed choice about whether to 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?

COVID-19 vaccines are very effective in protecting you from severe illness.

- People who received the COVID-19 vaccines were less likely to become ill with COVID-19 and 100% protected against severe disease and death. It is still possible to get and transmit COVID-19 after a vaccine.^{2,5,15}
- If the number of COVID-19 cases in your community goes up, your risk of getting COVID-19 goes up.
- 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.^{3,5,6}
- Even if you already had a COVID-19 infection and recovered, you could get infected again. The vaccine may offer long-term protection.^{3,5}

There is growing evidence about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy.

- These vaccines do not contain a live virus.⁵
- Many other vaccines are routinely given in pregnancy and are safe. For example, whooping cough and flu vaccines are offered during pregnancy, with no bad outcomes reported. Vaccines are a standard of care in Canada, providing the parent and baby with protection against infectious diseases.¹³
- While pregnant people were not included in the original studies, many have now received the vaccine without evidence of harm.
- The antibodies a pregnant individual makes from the vaccine likely pass to the baby and may help keep the baby safe after birth.¹⁴

Getting the vaccine can help prevent complications or bad outcomes for parent or baby.

- Like everyone else, most pregnant people have mild COVID-19. However, pregnant people are at an increased risk of severe illness requiring hospital care and admission to the intensive care unit compared to those who are not pregnant.^{1,4,6,7,17}
- Giving birth too early in pregnancy (preterm birth), having a caesarean delivery, and having a baby admitted into a neonatal intensive care unit is more common in pregnant people with severe COVID-19.^{1,4,17}

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

Clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines did not include 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. A few people got pregnant during the vaccine trials. So far, the results are similar to people who got a placebo (no vaccine) and got pregnant.
- The mRNA vaccine is not likely to have an increased risk of side effects for pregnant people, such as pregnancy loss or development issues. Current data collected on 35,000 pregnant people who received the vaccine show no negative effects on female reproduction or the baby's development in pregnancy.¹⁶
- Based on what we know about how COVID-19 vaccines work, there is no reason to believe the vaccines would be unsafe or less safe during pregnancy.¹⁹
- As with any vaccine, allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, are rare but can occur. Talk to your health care provider if you have allergies to medications.

Anyone getting the vaccine may have some side effects.^{3,6,15}

- As with other vaccines, some people may develop mild side effects in the days after immunization. This is caused by the immune system's normal response to the vaccine. These side effects are generally not serious and go away on their own.^{3,5}
- 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
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle Pain
- Fever

Uncommon Side Effects

(may affect up to 1 in 100 people)



- Enlarged lymph nodes (Pfizer and AstraZeneca)
- Fever (Moderna)

Additional information on side effects available [online here](#).

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 should outweigh the risks for the person and their baby. The person must be told that initial clinical trials on these vaccines have not been done on this population.¹¹

The *Ontario Society of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists* and *The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada* (SOGC), also advise that pregnant people should be given the chance to make an informed choice to get the COVID-19 vaccine.^{9,10} SOGC state that **all pregnant women** in any stage of pregnancy should get **any of the COVID-19 vaccines** approved in Canada. The decision should be based on the individual's personal values and an understanding that the risk of infection or illness from COVID-19 outweighs the potential risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy.¹⁹

The Ontario immunization strategy has included pregnant people as a priority population to get the COVID-19 vaccine because of their increased risk of severe illness. This means all pregnant people are currently eligible to receive the vaccine to help reduce their risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Speak to your health care provider to learn if the benefits of getting the vaccine outweigh the risks. If you decide to get the COVID-19 vaccine, it is recommended to wait two weeks before or after other vaccines.^{5,18}

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 live in a community with a lot of COVID-19 cases
- You have regular contact with people outside your home
- You live in a crowded housing situation (such as a shelter)
- You, or a member of your household, work in a high-risk environment (for example, you are front-line essential worker or a healthcare worker)

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

- You have medical problems such as pre-pregnancy diabetes, pre-pregnancy high blood pressure, a compromised immune system, kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease or asthma
- You are overweight
- 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. The risk of getting COVID is likely higher than the risk of the vaccine.^{8,7,12}

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.^{10,11} Antibodies have been shown to pass in the breast milk but we do not yet know how much this will protect your baby.¹⁴

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.¹⁰

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 before getting pregnant (where possible). It is not known if a person should delay getting pregnant after getting the vaccine. There is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine causes fertility issues.⁴ Talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits of getting the vaccine if you are planning a pregnancy.¹⁰

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 severe illness from COVID-19.

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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For more information on the intended use of this resource and references, please go to www.PCMCH.on.ca/COVID-19Vaccine