COVID-19
Planning for your vaccine

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry of Health

CDC
BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

You're pregnant or breastfeeding. Should you get a COVID-19 vaccine?

This handout is meant to help you make an informed choice about whether to get a COVID-19 vaccine while you are pregnant or breastfeeding. For most people, getting a COVID-19 vaccine is the safest choice to protect them from COVID-19. While these vaccines have not yet been tested in those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, health experts in Canada agree that getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a reasonable choice for most pregnant and breastfeeding people. You will need to make a decision based on your own comfort, your individual risk of getting COVID-19, and the chance that you may get seriously ill if you get infected.

COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy or breastfeeding

It is important to know that:
- There is currently no known specific serious risk (such as an increased risk of miscarriage or possible birth defect) of getting a COVID-19 vaccine while pregnant or breastfeeding* (or providing expressed human milk) to either the person being vaccinated or the child.

- There is no need to avoid starting or stopping breastfeeding if you get a COVID-19 vaccine.

* *Not everyone uses the term breastfeeding to describe their feeding experience and may prefer to use other terms such as nursing or chestfeeding. Use whichever terms you're most comfortable with, and ask that your friends, family and health care providers use them, too.*

Benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine while you are pregnant or breastfeeding

Being infected with COVID-19 can make you very sick. It may make you even sicker if you are pregnant.

- If you are infected with COVID-19 and are pregnant, you are three times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) than those infected with COVID-19 who are not pregnant.
- If you are pregnant and you have diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, kidney, liver, lung or heart disease, are very overweight or are a smoker, you are even more likely to be seriously ill from COVID-19 if you get this infection.
  - Preterm birth may be more common if you are pregnant and become severely ill with COVID-19.

Currently available COVID-19 vaccines are very effective in preventing people from getting sick with COVID-19.

- The clinical trials that studied the COVID-19 vaccine did not include individuals who were pregnant or breastfeeding. However, there is no reason to believe that the vaccines would not work as well if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19, a vaccine can help protect you from getting sick with COVID-19 and may reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to others.
- The vaccine helps your body to produce antibodies that will protect you from getting sick if you are exposed to COVID-19. These protective antibodies pass into your milk and may also protect your child from infection.

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Benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine while you are pregnant or breastfeeding *(continued)*

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and cannot give you COVID-19.

- These vaccines have no live virus and cannot cause COVID-19.
- Other vaccines routinely given in pregnancy or during breastfeeding are safe
    - For example, tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis and influenza vaccines are commonly given during pregnancy
    - Discuss the ideal time to wait between vaccines with your care provider if you are getting other vaccines in pregnancy.

Risks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine while pregnant or breastfeeding

COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnant or breastfeeding people.

- Clinical trials are monitoring study participants who became pregnant before or shortly after receiving vaccine doses. To date, there have been no harmful effects or specific serious risks such as increased risk of miscarriage or birth defects, noted from the vaccine on pregnant or breastfeeding people.
- Studies of these vaccines in pregnant and breastfeeding people are now being done and will provide information in the future.

For people who choose to get immunized while pregnant or become pregnant shortly after immunization, you may wish to participate in a study of Canadian COVID-19 Vaccine for Pregnant and Lactating Women with University of British Columbia:
https://ridprogram.med.ubc.ca/vaccine-surveillance

Side effects are common after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

- Common side effects include:
    - Pain, redness or swelling at the injection site
    - Fatigue
    - Headache
    - Muscle pain
    - Chills
    - Joint pain
    - Fever

- Fever in pregnancy or when breastfeeding can be managed safely by taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®). If however, you are concerned about this side effect, discuss your concerns with your care provider, as one option may be to delay your COVID-19 vaccine until after your first trimester.

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What do the experts currently recommend?

The **BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)** recommends vaccination because it reduces the likelihood of getting COVID-19; vaccination protects both you and those around you. The **Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC)** recommends that pregnant or breastfeeding people should be offered the COVID-19 vaccine at any time if they are eligible and if they have no contraindications. The SOGC also says that a vaccination decision should be based on an individual's personal values and their understanding of the risks and benefits of getting or not getting the vaccine while pregnant or breastfeeding.

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends that the COVID-19 vaccine may be offered to pregnant and breastfeeding people if the benefits outweigh the risks for each pregnant person and their unborn baby, and if the individual makes their decision knowing that there is currently no study evidence on how well the COVID-19 vaccines protect pregnant or breastfeeding people, and whether it is as safe as for non-pregnant people, including the developing baby.

Balancing the risks and benefits to decide what's right for you

To help make an informed decision, try to understand as much as you can about COVID-19 and the vaccine. The BCCDC has information that can help: **https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/covid-19-vaccines**

Consider your individual circumstances, including your likelihood of exposure to the COVID-19 virus at work and in your home and community.

Additional considerations include:

- Do you have medical conditions that could cause you to be seriously ill if you get COVID-19?

- Are you able to work from home to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 until the end of your pregnancy?

Balancing the risks and benefits will help you decide what's right for you. Your options are:

1. To get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available to you in BC.
2. To get the COVID-19 vaccine later on in your pregnancy. Discuss with your care provider (doctor, nurse, midwife, or nurse practitioner) about when you feel most comfortable getting the vaccine during your pregnancy. For example, if you are concerned about fever as a side effect during the first trimester you might choose to receive it early in your second trimester.
3. To wait for more information about the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy and breastfeeding.
4. To choose not to get vaccinated until after pregnancy. You are the decision maker. If you choose not to be vaccinated for COVID-19, that decision will not impact or change the care that you receive from your healthcare providers.

If you get the COVID-19 vaccine, continue to follow Public Health Guidelines:
Maintain physical distance, clean your hands regularly, wear a mask, and follow public health advice.

For more info, visit **www.pregnancyinfo.ca/covid**