

COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy

Making the right decision about COVID-19 vaccination while pregnant is difficult.

The SOGC has consulted with a national panel of experts to help you and your health care provider decide about whether vaccination is right for you.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 refers to infections caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It can mainly affect the respiratory system but also other body systems. The virus can easily pass from one person to another, even before the person has any symptoms or knows that they are sick (i.e., when they are asymptomatic). Many people will only have a mild illness with COVID-19, but the person who catches it from them can become seriously ill.

What about getting COVID-19 while pregnant?

Most people who get COVID-19 while pregnant will have a mild illness and both mother and baby will do well. But we now know that some will get very sick, with greater risks of serious complications, including admission to the intensive care unit, needing a ventilator to help with breathing, or even death. If you get seriously ill with COVID-19, there is an increased risk that your baby may be born before your due date.

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

There are two vaccines approved for use in Canada. Both are called messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines, which refers to the way they teach the body to make antibodies to fight off the virus. **The mRNA vaccines will NOT alter DNA.**

The vaccines do not contain live virus; we do not give vaccines that contain live virus in pregnancy.



The mRNA vaccines contain a fragment of information that lets cells in the body make a protein that mimics a part of the virus' outer spiky shell. This "spike protein" is **harmless** and will quickly break down in the body, but not before the immune system recognizes it and makes antibodies. If you are later exposed to the actual virus, the immune system uses the antibodies to attack and remove the virus, before it can make you seriously sick.

What do we know about the safety in pregnancy?

Since pregnant women were not included in the research trials, information is limited. We do know that 23 women who were part of the study were pregnant, and those pregnancies are ongoing. We expect more information as time goes on. Based on what we know about how these vaccines work, there is no theoretical reason to think they would be unsafe, or less safe in pregnancy. Normally, we like to wait until we have a lot of information, but in a pandemic we have to consider the real risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy.

Should anyone who is pregnant get vaccinated?

Anyone who is pregnant should discuss the vaccine with their prenatal care provider. Some will decide their risks of getting a serious COVID-19 infection are very low, and choose not to be vaccinated. Others will decide their very real risks support vaccination.

What are the risks to consider when making a decision?

There are two groups at greater risk from COVID-19 in pregnancy:

1. Those who are at the front lines or in a community outbreak situation
2. Those who have additional risk factors, including:
 - Age > 35 years
 - Obesity (BMI > 30)
 - Pre-pregnancy high blood pressure
 - Pre-pregnancy diabetes
 - Asthma
 - Heart disease

If you fall into one of the high risk groups, or have other health problems, it is important to talk to your prenatal care provider to address your questions.

How else can I protect myself?

The basic protection against COVID-19 is the same for everyone, but it is even more important if you are pregnant:

- Avoid situations where you are exposed to persons with COVID-19, especially avoid prolonged exposure (more than 15 minutes).
- If you are a front line worker, talk to your employer about moving to a lower exposure type of work.
- Wear a clean face mask to cover your nose and mouth.
- Don't touch or adjust your mask when it is on your face.
- Remove your mask by holding onto the straps and pulling it carefully away from your face.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Follow public health guidance about gatherings, whether indoors or outdoors.
- Talk to your prenatal care provider about the COVID-19 vaccine, and other vaccines recommended during pregnancy.



More information:
pregnancyinfo.ca