



COVID-19 VACCINATION ADVICE FOR PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN

Please note: this information is correct on 22 November 2021.

Any changes to this information will be published by the Messages for Mothers team to our website (www.messagesformothers.co.za) as soon as it becomes available to us. We understand that there are likely to be some changes to vaccine recommendations and distribution, over time.

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COVID-19 VACCINATION ADVICE FOR PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN

All the discussion about vaccines can be scary and confusing. Also, the many changes that are happening with COVID-19 vaccinations, can be unsettling. There is a lot of unhelpful false information that stops people from making good decisions. We hope these messages offer some guidance based on scientific evidence and some reassurance. It is important that you discuss the risks and benefits with your healthcare provider and make your own decision with all the correct information available at the time.

ARE PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN ABLE TO GET ACCESS TO THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to all pregnant and breastfeeding women who are 12 years and older during any stage of pregnancy. Eventually younger women will also be eligible to be vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccination should routinely be offered to eligible women during their antenatal and postnatal visits.

IF I HAVE RECENTLY HAD THE COVID-19 VACCINE AND THEN FIND OUT I AM PREGNANT, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It is possible that you might get vaccinated while you are pregnant without realising yet that you are pregnant. Or, you might become pregnant soon after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. If this happens, there is no reason to be concerned. You should be reassured that it is very unlikely that there will be any harmful effects from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine for you or your baby. In fact, there is likely to be benefit - the vaccine will protect you against getting the severe complications of COVID-19 during your pregnancy. It is important to go for antenatal care visits, and to tell the nurses and doctors at the clinic that you have recently had a COVID-19 vaccine.

IF I AM PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING, WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Most health experts would highly recommend that you should get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine as a pregnant or breastfeeding woman. From the growing scientific evidence, it is now known that there are far more benefits to you and the fetus or baby, than any possible harms. This is especially true if you are a healthcare or essential worker, or have a high-risk medical condition.

High-risk medical conditions include:

- Weakened immune system due to conditions such as HIV, diabetes or cancer
- Respiratory (lung) conditions such as TB or poorly controlled asthma
- Known kidney or heart disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Chronic hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Smoking
- Having an organ transplant





SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF RECEIVING THE COVID-19 VACCINE INCLUDE:

- Vaccination prevents most people, including pregnant women, from getting the infection of COVID-19.
- If you do get infected with COVID-19 after being vaccinated you are less likely to get severe illness or die from COVID-19.
- This is important, because without vaccination, COVID-19 may be more dangerous in pregnant women, especially towards the end of pregnancy. As a pregnant woman, vaccination will give you reassurance that you are protected from COVID-19 when you have to attend the clinic or hospital for antenatal care and childbirth.
- You won't get COVID-19 from the vaccination. COVID-19 vaccinations do not contain live coronavirus. Other, non-live vaccines, such as vaccines against influenza and tetanus, have been used safely in pregnancy for many years.
- If you are pregnant and have been vaccinated, you will pass some protection against COVID-19 on to your baby during the pregnancy, so that the baby is less likely to get COVID-19 during the first few months of life.

SOME OF THE RISKS OF GETTING THE COVID-19 VACCINE INCLUDE:

- Mild side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are common and can include: sore arm (where the vaccine is injected), tiredness, headaches, muscle pain, fever and joint pain. We recommend that you use paracetamol tablets for this. These side effects are usually mild and only last a few days.
- Severe complications of the vaccine (e.g. abnormal blood clotting) have been reported but are extremely rare. You are far more likely to get COVID-19 infection and die from it than to get any severe complication from the vaccine.
- In other countries across the world, tens of thousands of pregnant women have already received a COVID-19 vaccine. There is no evidence from this experience that the vaccine causes harm to the fetus or the newborn baby. In fact, getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy will help to protect your newborn baby from getting COVID-19 infection after birth.

I AM PLANNING TO BECOME PREGNANT - SHOULD I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Yes, it will make your pregnancy safer. It is advisable for women who are planning to become pregnant to be vaccinated before pregnancy. It would be best for this to happen at least two months before the pregnancy starts, so that the vaccine will already be fully effective by the time you become pregnant. But remember, if you missed out and are already pregnant, don't worry, you can get vaccinated at any stage of the pregnancy.

CAN I BE VACCINATED IF I AM BREASTFEEDING?

Yes, there are no known risks for the baby if a breastfeeding mother gets vaccinated against COVID-19. There are many benefits for the baby if the mother is vaccinated.





HOW WILL I BE ABLE TO GET A COVID-19 VACCINE WHILE I AM PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

Ask the nurse or doctor at the antenatal clinic or at the facility where your pregnancy has been confirmed, what the local plans are for vaccination of patients. Vaccines may be given at the antenatal or postnatal clinic or you may be asked to go to another site for it. Ask whether you need to register on the EVDS system or can go directly to the site with some form of identification.

The options for registration for vaccination with the Department of Health (EVDS) are shown below. You can register using one of the three options:

1. Self-registration web portal: <https://vaccine.enroll.health.gov.za> or
2. Send a WhatsApp saying “REGISTER” to 0600 123 456 or
3. SMS *134*832* followed by your ID number. No ID? Just dial *134*832#

Once you are registered on the EVDS system, find your nearest vaccination site. On the day you go for your vaccination, please remember to take your ID, passport or driver’s license along with you.

If you don’t have your ID document, then your ID number, if valid, should be accepted.

Non-South African citizens are also eligible, including asylum seekers and refugees.

For assistance: toll-free line: 0800 029 999

SOURCES:

Senior specialist obstetricians-gynaecologists and paediatricians and other doctors involved with Department of Health guideline and policy development for COVID-19: Prof Susan Fawcus, A/Prof Simone Honikman, Dr Neil Moran, Dr James Nuttall, Dr Natasha Rhoda, Prof Priya Soma-Pillay

Find out more about Covid-19 vaccination from trusted sources here:

<https://coronavirus.westerncape.gov.za/covid-19-vaccination> and

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/vaccine-updates/>

<https://messagesformothers.co.za/resources-2/physical-health/>

