



Fetal Therapy Nurse Network



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Last updated: July 30, 2021

# COVID-19 Vaccination if You Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding

**The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) and other pregnancy experts recommend that pregnant and lactating people be vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination is the best way to reduce the risks of COVID-19 infection and COVID-related complications for both you and your baby.**

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued emergency use authorization for three vaccines to prevent COVID-19:

- The two-dose Pfizer vaccine for people 16 years and older
- The two-dose Moderna vaccine for people 18 years and older
- The one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine for people 18 years and older (you may also see this vaccine referred to as the “Janssen vaccine”)

For those receiving the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the second dose is given 21 days (Pfizer) and 28 days (Moderna) after the first dose.<sup>1</sup> The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is only one dose.<sup>2</sup>

[Anyone can get the COVID vaccines](#) free of charge regardless of immigration status or whether they have insurance. You may be asked for your social security number, but it is NOT required to get vaccinated.

## Information for Pregnant Individuals

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant and are thinking about getting vaccinated, consider talking with your health care professional about the vaccine.

To help with your decision, you should consider the following key points:

What are benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy?

- The vaccines can help protect you from getting COVID-19. With the two-dose vaccines, you must get both doses for maximum effectiveness. It's not yet known how long protection lasts.
- Another potential benefit is that getting the vaccine while pregnant may help you pass anti-COVID-19 antibodies to your baby. In numerous studies of vaccinated moms, antibodies were found in the umbilical cord blood of babies and in the mother's breastmilk.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with other federal partners, are monitoring people who have been vaccinated for serious side effects. So far, more than 139,000 pregnant people have been vaccinated. No unexpected pregnancy or fetal problems have occurred. There have been no reports of any increased risk of pregnancy loss, growth problems, or birth defects.
- A safe vaccine is generally considered one in which the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh the risks. The current vaccines are not live vaccines. There is only a very small chance that they cross the placenta, so it's unlikely that they even reach the fetus. Vaccines don't affect future fertility. The only people who should NOT get vaccinated are those who have had a severe allergic reaction to vaccines in the past or any vaccine ingredients.
- Side effects may occur in the first 3 days after getting vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> These include mild to moderate fever, headache, and muscle aches. Side effects may be worse after the second dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.<sup>3, 4</sup> Fever should be avoided during pregnancy, especially in the first trimester. Those who develop a fever after vaccination can take acetaminophen (Tylenol). This medication is safe to use during pregnancy and does not affect how the vaccine works.

### What are the known risks of getting COVID-19 during pregnancy?

About 1 to 3 per 1,000 pregnant women with COVID-19 will develop severe disease. Compared with those who aren't pregnant, pregnant people infected by the COVID-19 virus:

- Are 3 times more likely to need ICU care
- Are 2 to 3 times more likely to need advanced life support and a breathing tube
- Have a small increased risk of dying due to COVID-19

They may also be at increased risk of stillbirth and preterm birth.<sup>6-8</sup>

### What is my risk of getting COVID-19?

Your risk of getting COVID-19 depends on the chance that you will come into contact with another infected person. The risk may be higher if you live in a community where there is a lot of COVID-19 infection or work in healthcare or another high-contact setting.

### What is my risk for severe complications if I get COVID-19?

Data show that older pregnant women; those with preexisting health conditions, such as a body mass index higher than 35 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, diabetes, and heart disorders; and Black or Latinx women have an especially increased risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.<sup>6-8</sup>

If you still have questions about the vaccines or need more information, ask your health care provider or go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#).

## An Update on the Johnson & Johnson Vaccine

In April 2021, the FDA and CDC called for a brief pause to use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. They did so after reports of a severe side effect in a very small number of women younger than age 50 following vaccination. This side effect, called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), causes blood clots (thrombosis) combined with low levels of platelets (thrombocytopenia).

TTS following the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is extremely rare. At the time of this update, it has occurred in only 7 people per 1 million Johnson & Johnson shots given. According to the CDC, being on hormonal birth control (the pill, patch, or ring), pregnancy, breastfeeding, or being recently pregnant does not make you more likely to develop TTS after getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The pause was lifted on April 23, 2021, after the FDA and CDC determined that the known benefits of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine far outweigh the risks. Health care professionals have been alerted to the possibility of this side effect in people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

National organizations continue to recommend COVID-19 vaccination with any of the vaccines for pregnant women. All women younger than age 50 years, whether pregnant, breastfeeding, or not, should be aware of the very rare risk of TTS after getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines don't have this risk. If you get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, seek medical help right away if you develop any of the following symptoms within 3 weeks of getting your shot:

- Severe or persistent headaches or blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Leg swelling
- Persistent abdominal pain
- Easy bruising or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the injection site

Experts continue to collect health and safety information from pregnant people who have been vaccinated. If you have questions about vaccination during pregnancy, visit the [CDC website](#) or talk to your health care professional.

## Information for Breastfeeding/Lactating Individuals

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine and other pregnancy experts recommend COVID-19 vaccination for people who are breastfeeding/lactating. You don't have to delay or stop breastfeeding just because you get vaccinated.

## Getting Vaccinated

You can get vaccinated at any time during pregnancy. The CDC is committed to monitoring the vaccine's safety for all individuals. Your health professional or vaccine clinic may give you information about enrolling in the [v-safe after vaccination health checker](#) (see the box below).

Even after you're fully vaccinated, it is important to follow the [CDC's guidance](#) for wearing a mask indoors in areas where there are substantial or high rates of COVID-19 infection. You can check the infection rate in your area [here](#).

### What Happens When You Enroll in v-Safe?

The [v-safe after vaccination health checker](#) program lets the CDC check in with you after your vaccination. At sign-up, you can indicate that you are pregnant. Once you do that, expect the following:

- Someone may call you from the v-safe program to ask initial questions and get more information.
- You may be asked to enroll in the vaccine pregnancy registry, which is collecting information about any effects of the vaccine during pregnancy. This is a great way to help scientists monitor the vaccine's safety and effectiveness.

## References

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