I'm pregnant. Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

For most people, getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice. However, trials testing the vaccine on pregnant and breastfeeding women have not been completed. The information below will help you make an informed choice about whether you should get the COVID-19 vaccine while you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine.

1. COVID-19 is dangerous. It is more dangerous for pregnant women.

   - COVID-19 patients who are pregnant are 5 times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) or on a ventilator than COVID-19 patients who are not pregnant.
   - Preterm birth may be more common for pregnant women with severe COVID-19, but other obstetric complications, such as stillbirth, do not appear to be increased.
   - Pregnant women are more likely to die of COVID-19 than non-pregnant women of the same age with COVID-19.

2. The COVID-19 vaccine will prevent 94–95% of COVID-19 infections.

   - As COVID-19 infections go up in our communities, your risk of getting COVID-19 goes up too.
   - Getting the vaccine will help prevent you from getting COVID-19.

3. The COVID-19 vaccine cannot give you COVID-19.

   - The COVID-19 vaccine does NOT contain a live virus.
   - The COVID-19 vaccine does NOT contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women or to a fetus.
   - Many vaccines are routinely given in pregnancy and are safe (including tetanus, diphtheria and flu shots).

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

1. The COVID-19 vaccine has not yet been tested on pregnant women.

   - The vaccine was tested in tens of thousands of people and there were no serious side effects. However, it was not tested on pregnant women.
   - We do not have data on whether the vaccine works as well on pregnant women as it did on non-pregnant people.
   - We do not have data on whether there are unique risks for pregnant women who get the vaccine—such as an increased risk of miscarriage or fetal abnormalities.

2. People getting the vaccine will probably have some side effects.

   - Although there were no serious side effects reported, many people had some side effects. The side effects were similar to the flu shot and include:
     - Injection site reactions like sore arm
     - Muscle pain
     - Chills
     - Fatigue
     - Joint pain
     - Headache
     - Fever
   - About 1% of people will get a high fever (over 102 F). A persistent high fever during the first trimester could increase the risk of congenital defects or miscarriage. For this reason, you may choose to delay your COVID-19 vaccine until after your first trimester.

     The CDC recommends using Tylenol (acetaminophen) during pregnancy if you have a high fever.

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What do the experts recommend?

COVID-19 is dangerous and can spread very easily. Because of this, the FDA has given Emergency Use Authorization of the COVID-19 vaccines that have met criteria for efficacy and safety in clinical trials.

However, because there are currently no studies on pregnant women, there are no clear recommendations. This is standard for a new drug and is not due to any particular concern with these vaccines.

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine strongly recommends that pregnant people have access to COVID-19 vaccines. They recommend that each person have a discussion with their health care professional about their own personal choice.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that the COVID-19 vaccine should not be withheld from pregnant people who meet the criteria for vaccination.

What else should I think about to help me decide?

1. Be sure you understand as much as you can about COVID-19 and about the vaccine. Ask your doctor or health care provider(s).
2. Look at the bullets points below and think about your personal risks of getting COVID-19. Are you able to stay safe?

The risks of getting sick from COVID-19 are higher if:

- You have contact with people outside your household who do not wear masks.
- You are 35 years old or older.
- You are overweight.
- You have other medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease.
- You are a smoker.
- You are a racial or ethnic minority or your community has a high rate of COVID-19 infections.
- You are a health care worker.

If you are at a higher risk of getting COVID-19, it may make sense to get the vaccine.

If you are not at higher risk for COVID-19 and:

- You are always able to wear a mask.
- You and the people you live with can socially distance from others during your entire pregnancy.
- Your community does NOT have high or increasing COVID-19 cases.
- You are nervous about the vaccine itself (you are more worried about any unknown risks of the vaccine, than about getting COVID-19).
- You have had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine.

It might make sense for you to wait for more information.

What about breastfeeding?

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine reports that there is no reason to believe that the vaccine affects the safety of breastmilk. When we have an infection or get a vaccine, our bodies make antibodies to fight the infection. Antibodies formed from vaccines given during pregnancy do pass into the breastmilk and then to the baby to help prevent infections. Because the vaccine does not contain the virus, there is no risk of breastmilk containing the virus.

Summary

- COVID-19 seems to cause more harm in pregnant women than in women of the same age who are not pregnant.
- The risks of getting the COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy are thought to be small but are not totally known.
- You should consider your own personal risk of getting COVID-19. If your personal risk is high or there are many cases of COVID-19 in your community, it may make sense for you to get the vaccine while pregnant.
- Whether or not you get the vaccine during pregnancy is your choice.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women may choose to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but you should talk with your doctor or provider to see if getting the COVID-19 makes sense for you.

Please use this QR code or visit uchealth.org/covidvaccine to learn more about the COVID-19 vaccines.

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