

COVID-19 Vaccines for People Who Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding



For most people, getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice.

The COVID-19 vaccine, like many vaccines, has gone through several phases of tests with volunteers. So far, the tests have not included people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

We do not yet know if the vaccine is as effective in pregnant people as it is for those who are not pregnant. We also do not yet know if the vaccine has specific risks or side effects for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding, or to unborn babies. However, based on how the vaccine works, experts believe it is unlikely to pose specific risks to these groups.

The decision whether to receive the vaccine is your choice and you are not required to talk with your provider before you receive it. You should consider your own personal risk of getting COVID when considering vaccination. However, a conversation between you and your provider may help you with your decision about the vaccine.

Who is at higher risk of getting sick with COVID-19?

You are at higher risk from getting sick with COVID if you:

- Are pregnant
- Are 35 years old or older
- Are overweight
- Have other medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, COPD, or heart disease
- Are a smoker
- Are a racial or ethnic minority, or your community has a high rate of COVID infections
- Are healthcare worker
- Have contact with people outside of your household who do not wear masks

What are the benefits of getting the vaccine?

COVID-19 is more dangerous for pregnant people.

- COVID-19 patients who are pregnant are five times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) or on a ventilator than those who are not pregnant.
- Pregnant patients are more likely to die of COVID-19 than non-pregnant patients who are the same age.
- Severe illness in babies has been reported but appears to be rare. Babies with underlying medical conditions and babies born premature (earlier than 37 weeks) might be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- Getting the vaccine will help prevent you from getting severely ill with COVID-19.
- We know that antibodies formed from other vaccines do pass into breast milk. These antibodies may help protect your baby from getting COVID-19 infections.

How does the vaccine work?

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. mRNA vaccines have been studied for more than 20 years. This type of vaccine uses your body to briefly produce a viral protein to train your immune system in recognizing the COVID-19 virus. In most cases, your immune system can then fight off the virus and prevent the COVID-19 illness.

- The Pfizer and Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to prevent approximately 95 percent of COVID-19 disease after the second dose.
- Your immune response can cause some symptoms or side effects, but this leads to improved immunity against the actual virus.
- The vaccine does not have ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant people or to unborn babies.
- There is no live COVID-19 virus in these vaccines and there is no way for the vaccine to give people COVID-19. Other vaccines that are currently recommended in pregnancy also do not include live viruses.
- If you become pregnant after you receive the first dose of the vaccine, you should get the second dose in order to complete your immunization.

What are possible side effects of the vaccine?

Clinical studies of the vaccine did not show serious side effects, but if you get the vaccine you could experience:

- Injection (shot) site reactions (like a sore arm)
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Fever*

*If you get a fever when you are pregnant, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends using acetaminophen (Tylenol).

What if I am breastfeeding?

Clinical studies of the vaccine did not show serious side effects. Here is information about COVID-19 mRNA vaccine and breastfeeding:

- Experts believe that there is no reason to believe that the vaccine affects the safety of breast milk. There is no reason to stop breastfeeding if you get the vaccine.
- We know that antibodies formed from other vaccines or from an infection do pass into the breastmilk and then to the baby to help prevent those infections and this is thought to also be true for the COVID-19 vaccine.
- The COVID-19 vaccine should be offered to lactating individuals similar to non-lactating individuals.

If you decide to get the vaccine and have any concerning or worrisome symptoms following vaccination, seek medical care as soon as possible.