

Information sheet and decision aid: Updated 28 May 2021

## I am pregnant and have been offered a COVID-19 vaccination. What are my options?

**Vaccination is being offered to pregnant women at the same time as the rest of the population, based on age and clinical risk.**

Trials testing the vaccine in pregnant and breastfeeding women have not yet taken place. Whether to get the vaccine in pregnancy is your choice. The information below will help you make an informed choice about whether to get the COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

### Your options:



Get a COVID-19 vaccine

or



Wait for more information  
about the vaccine in pregnancy

### Who can be vaccinated?

COVID-19 vaccination is offered to the following groups of pregnant women:

1. Those with high risk medical conditions who have a **greater risk** of severe illness from COVID-19
2. Health or social care workers – who are at **increased risk of catching COVID-19**
3. People considered at high risk of COVID-19 because of health and personal factors that include age, ethnicity, BMI and **underlying health conditions** (this includes pregnant women in priority group 6)
4. Women diagnosed with **gestational diabetes** in pregnancy or pregnant women with a BMI of more than 40
5. Women as they are called by age group

As COVID-19 vaccines are made available to younger people in the general population, they will also be made available to pregnant women in those age groups.

## What are the benefits of the vaccination?

### ✓ **COVID-19 may be more dangerous in pregnancy**

Studies have shown that hospital admission and severe illness may be more common in pregnant women (compared to those not pregnant), especially those in the third trimester of pregnancy, and that stillbirth and preterm birth is more likely (compared to pregnant women without COVID-19).

Pregnant women with underlying medical conditions are at higher risk of severe illness.

### ✓ **Vaccination is effective in preventing COVID-19 infection**

### ✓ **You cannot get COVID-19 from vaccination**

- COVID-19 vaccines do NOT contain live coronavirus
- Vaccines do NOT contain any additional ingredients that are harmful to pregnant women or their babies
- Other non-live vaccines (whooping cough, influenza) are considered to be safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies.



You may wish to discuss COVID-19 vaccination in more detail with your doctor or midwife



If you decide to have a COVID-19 vaccine, please tell the vaccination team that you are pregnant so that this can be recorded.

## What are the risks of the vaccination?

### ✗ **The COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been tested specifically in pregnant women.**

- COVID-19 vaccines have been given to large numbers of people to ensure they meet stringent standards of effectiveness and safety.
- There is limited UK data on COVID-19 vaccination and pregnancy. Monitoring from the United States, where more than 100,000 pregnant women have had a COVID-19 vaccine (using Pfizer BioNTech or Moderna vaccines), has not raised any safety concerns. More information may come from studies in the future.
- Future studies in pregnancy will give us more information on how effective the vaccine is in pregnancy, and on pregnancy outcomes after vaccination. There have not been any signals to suggest safety concerns so far.

### ✗ **Side effects from the vaccine are common. These do not affect pregnancy, but may include:**

- injection site reactions (sore arm)
- fatigue
- headache
- muscle pain
- fever, chills
- joint pain

### ✗ **Extremely rare but serious side effects involving thrombosis (blood clots) have been reported for the AstraZeneca vaccine. The Pfizer BioNTech or Moderna vaccines should be offered to pregnant women where available as most of the safety monitoring data from the United States relates to these two vaccines.**

## How to decide: COVID-19 vaccination advice for women who are, or may be pregnant

This leaflet is designed to help you make an informed choice about whether to have the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy if it is offered to you. At present, the COVID-19 vaccine is being offered to pregnant women at the same time as the rest of the population, based on age and clinical risk. We know that vaccines are effective in preventing COVID-19. Some pregnant women may become seriously unwell with COVID-19 infection, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. There is emerging data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy, and no evidence that the vaccines can cause harm to you or your baby.

### What should I do to help me decide?

- Make sure you know as much as you can about the vaccine and the risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy. You can ask your midwife, doctor or an immunisation nurse.
- Look up the information on the [NHS](#), [Public Health England \(PHE\)](#) or [professional](#) websites. Available evidence on the safety of vaccines in pregnancy is published by [UKTIS](#), part of PHE.
- Look at the information below and think about your risk of catching and becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19. Are you able to reduce your chance of being exposed to COVID-19?

### What is known about COVID-19 in pregnancy?

About two-thirds of women who test positive for COVID-19 in pregnancy have no symptoms at all. In the UK, surveillance shows that approximately one in 100 pregnant women who have been admitted to hospital test positive for COVID-19 (although this will change during the stages of the pandemic). However, some pregnant women can get life-threatening illness from COVID-19 – particularly if they have underlying health conditions.

In the later stages of pregnancy women are at increased risk of becoming seriously unwell with COVID-19. If you have COVID-19 in pregnancy, you are twice as likely to have a stillbirth, and it is twice as likely that your baby will be born prematurely, which can affect their longterm health.

## What is known about the effects of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnant women?

Monitoring from the United States, where over 100,000 pregnant women have had a COVID-19 vaccine, has not raised any safety concerns. The large trials which showed that these vaccines are safe and effective did not include pregnant women – as often happens in clinical trials. This means there is limited information about the effects of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnant women.

COVID-19 vaccines do not contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women or to a developing baby. Studies of the vaccines in animals to look at the effects on pregnancy have shown no evidence that the vaccine causes harm to the pregnancy or fertility. The COVID-19 vaccines that we are using in the UK are not 'live' vaccines and so cannot cause COVID-19 infection in you or your baby.

Pregnant women should be offered the Pfizer BioNTech or Moderna vaccines, as most of the safety monitoring data from the United States relates to these two vaccines.

The government has advised that individuals under the age of 40 should be offered an alternative vaccine to the AstraZeneca vaccine, based on the risk/benefit ratio for that age group.



## Does it matter what stage of pregnancy I am in?

The vaccine should work whatever the stage of pregnancy you are in. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advises that women do not need a pregnancy test before vaccination, and that women planning a pregnancy do not need to delay pregnancy after vaccination. However, as COVID-19 has more serious complications in later pregnancy, some women may choose to delay their vaccine until after the first 12 weeks (which are most important for the baby's development) and will plan to have the first dose at any time from 13 weeks onwards.

## Will having a COVID-19 vaccination affect my work?

No vaccine is 100% effective, but studies suggest that it will help prevent some (but not necessarily all) transmission. So, having a vaccine will not change your occupational risk assessment. This includes advice that you should not work in high-risk areas if you have another serious medical condition, or if you are beyond 28 weeks' gestation. You will still need to follow the advice in your workplace and at home:

- practice social distancing
- wear a face mask as necessary
- wash your hands carefully and frequently

## The information below will help you to think about your decision to have the vaccine if you are pregnant and are eligible for vaccination

### You are at higher risk of catching COVID-19 if:

- you or someone in your household is a health or social care worker or works in a care home
- your community has a high or increasing rate of COVID infections
- you have frequent contact with people outside your home
- you are not able to comply with social distancing for the rest of your pregnancy
- you live in a crowded household
- you are of Black or Asian ethnicity, or from another minority ethnicity background



### You are at higher risk of becoming unwell with COVID-19 if:

- You have underlying medical conditions such as immune problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or asthma
- You are overweight
- You are over the age 35
- You are in your third trimester of pregnancy (over 28 weeks)



## What should I do if I am offered a COVID-19 vaccine?

- If you are at higher risk of catching COVID-19, you should consider getting the vaccine
- If you are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if you do catch COVID-19, you should consider getting the vaccine
- You may wish to discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination, including possible side-effects of the different vaccines, with a healthcare professional before making your final decision. If you choose to have a vaccine, then your healthcare professional will help to facilitate this choice. However, as for the non-pregnant population, you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine even if you haven't had a discussion with a healthcare professional.

Further information, Q&As, and the latest version of this leaflet are available at [rcog.org.uk/covid-vaccine](https://www.rcog.org.uk/covid-vaccine)