

Topic: COVID-19 vaccination for women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding

This clinical briefing provides information on the newly approved coronavirus vaccine regarding pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and those breastfeeding.

Potential impact of COVID-19 in this topic area

The following briefing is provided as a resource for midwives based on a combination of available evidence, public health and expert advice.

Current key guidance for this topic – advice for women

On 30 December 2020, [The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation \(JCVI\) published its latest advice](#) for the priority groups to receive the Oxford University/AstraZeneca and the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines. This includes updated advice for pregnant and breastfeeding women who meet other criteria for priority vaccination.

On 30 December 2020, the UK Government accepted the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise Oxford University/AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine for use. The JCVI confirms that although the available data do not indicate any safety concern or harm to pregnancy, there is insufficient evidence to recommend routine use of COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy.

However, **the JCVI now advises that if a pregnant woman meets the definition of being clinically extremely vulnerable, or is a frontline health or social care worker, including a carer in a residential home, then she should discuss the options of COVID-19 vaccination with her obstetrician and/or doctor.** The most likely relevant groups of pregnant women are:

- Solid organ transplant recipients
- Those with severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- Those who have homozygous sickle cell disease
- Receiving immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- Receiving dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (stage 5)
- Those with significant congenital or acquired heart disease
- Frontline health or social care workers, including carers in residential homes

The benefits and risks of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy should be discussed on an individualised basis. This should include a discussion around the lack of safety data for these specific vaccinations for pregnant and an acknowledgement that there is no known risk associated with giving other non-live vaccines to pregnant women.

The JCVI now advises that women who are planning a pregnancy should not be advised to delay having the vaccination or delay becoming pregnant after the vaccination course.

The JCVI also now advises that there is no known risk in giving these vaccines to breastfeeding women.

Breastfeeding women should therefore be offered vaccination if they are otherwise eligible, for example if they are clinically extremely vulnerable or they are a frontline health or social care worker, including a carer in a residential home. The developmental and health benefits of breastfeeding should be considered along with the woman's clinical need for immunisation against COVID-19, and the woman should be informed about the absence of safety data for the vaccine in breastfeeding women.

Current evidence base

Based on the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) the UK Government has approved the use of both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford University/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines. The vaccination programme started in December 2020 (week 50) and the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) has published advice on priority groups.

Based on the updated guidance from the JCVI, the RCM recommends the following:

- Pregnant women who are at high risk as they are clinically extremely vulnerable or at high exposure risk as a health or social care professional should have an individualised discussion about the risks and benefits of vaccination during pregnancy with their health professional. They should have the option of having the vaccine if they chose.
- We do not advise routine pregnancy testing before receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Those who are trying to become pregnant do not need to avoid pregnancy after vaccination.
- Pregnant women at high risk, including women with serious underlying health conditions and health and social care workers, should have an individualised discussion with a health professional about the potential risks and benefits of having the vaccine during pregnancy. This should include a discussion around the lack of safety data for these specific vaccinations for pregnant or breastfeeding women, and an acknowledgement that there is no known risk associated with giving other non-live vaccines to pregnant women.
- If the woman in the above at risk categories decides to have the vaccine, she can be provided with the COVID-19 vaccine. If the woman decides not to have the vaccine during pregnancy, she should be offered the vaccine as soon as possible after birth.
- There is no known risk in giving these vaccines to breastfeeding women. Breastfeeding women should therefore be offered vaccination if they are otherwise eligible, for example if they are a frontline health or social care worker, including a carer in a residential home or if they have underlying serious medical conditions. Women should be advised that there is lack of safety data for these specific vaccinations in breastfeeding.
- We are recommending that pregnant women who might be eligible for vaccination should receive it through their maternity unit or notify their local maternity unit when it is received. This is so that maternity staff can report it to the UKOSS/UKTIS vaccine registry, including report of follow-up post-vaccination of the women and their babies.

References and links to online and virtual support and guidance

[Priority groups for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination: advice from the JCVI, 30 December 2020.](#)
[COVID-19: vaccination programme guidance for healthcare practitioners.](#)