Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health
building a brighter future

This resource reflects the information available as of the date of issue. It is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions about this resource.

I am pregnant or breastfeeding. Should I get the COVID-19 Vaccine?

Getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice.

Studies of hundreds of thousands of pregnant people who have received COVID-19 vaccines show it is safe and helps prevent COVID-19 and protect against severe illness. The information below will help you make an informed choice about whether to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

YOUR OPTIONS

Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible	**Wait until your pregnancy and/or breastfeeding is complete**

What are the risks related to COVID-19 in pregnancy?

COVID-19 infection is dangerous. It is more dangerous in pregnancy.

- Most pregnant people with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms and make a full recovery; however, 20-30% of pregnant people will develop moderate to severe COVID illness requiring hospitalization.
- If you are COVID positive and pregnant, your risk of hospitalization, intensive care unit admission and the need for life support is much greater than if you are COVID positive and not pregnant.
- Many people will have ongoing medical complications even after the COVID pneumonia has resolved.
- If you have any type of COVID infection in pregnancy, there is an impact on pregnancy outcomes: your risk of stillbirth, preterm birth, high blood pressure, caesarean delivery and low birth weight are significantly increased with a COVID infection in pregnancy.
- COVID infection in pregnancy increases your risk of medical complications and death.

What are the **benefits** of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing infection and reducing spread.

- The mRNA COVID vaccines are effective at reducing the risk of getting a COVID infection caused by any of the variants of the virus (e.g., Delta variant) in both pregnant and non-pregnant people.
  - Vaccination decreases the chance of having a symptomatic COVID infection, the severity of the COVID illness and the chance of being hospitalized because of COVID.
  - Vaccination decreases the spread of the virus within your family and in your community.

The mRNA COVID vaccines are safe in pregnancy.

- Several studies with large numbers of pregnant people have shown that vaccination immediately before and/or during pregnancy has no impact on pregnancy outcomes (i.e., no change in the rate of miscarriage, preterm birth, stillbirth, growth restriction, high blood pressure during pregnancy, medical complications of pregnancy or death).

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

Pregnant and breastfeeding individuals who receive the mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) vaccine experience the same side effects of vaccination as non-pregnant individuals.

In a study of more than 35,000 pregnant and/or breastfeeding people who were monitored at the time of COVID-19 vaccination:

- The common side effects were:

  PAIN AT THE INJECTION SITE · HEADACHE · FATIGUE · MUSCLE/JOINT PAIN

- Less than 10% of pregnant people experienced a fever.

- Allergic reactions/anaphylaxis (serious life-threatening allergic reaction) were RARE.

- Very rare cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) following vaccination were reported and resolved without any complication.

The mRNA COVID vaccines:

X   **Do NOT** contain any live virus.

X   **Do NOT** contain any mercury, aluminum, formaldehyde or substances harmful to you and/or baby.

X   **Do NOT** contain any human and/or animal blood or by product(s).

X   **CANNOT** be measured in your bloodstream; thus, the baby **is NOT** exposed to the vaccine.
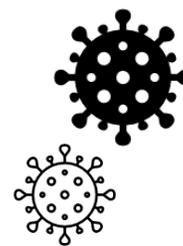
There are extremely few contraindications to taking the mRNA COVID vaccine.

- Pregnancy and/or breastfeeding is NOT a medical reason to not take the vaccine.

- People who have had a COVID infection remain at risk of re-infection or infection with a different variant of the virus; thus, should receive the vaccine for strong and long-lasting protection.

What do the **experts** recommend?

The *National Advisory Committee on Immunization* **(NACI)** strongly recommends that a complete vaccine series with an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine should be offered to people in the authorized age group who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

The **Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)** states that all pregnant people in Canada should be offered COVID-19 vaccination at any time during pregnancy or while breastfeeding if no contraindications exist.

In Ontario, all pregnant individuals in the authorized age group are currently eligible and recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any stage in pregnancy. The Ontario immunization strategy included pregnant people in the highest risk category of Phase 2 prioritization in the COVID-19 vaccination rollout because of their increased risk of severe illness.

What else should I think about to help me decide?

1 Make sure you understand as much as you can about COVID-19 and about the vaccine. Ask a trusted source, such as your obstetrician, midwife, family doctor or nurse.

2 **Think about your own personal risk.**
Look at the columns below and think about your risk of getting COVID-19 and having severe illness from COVID-19. Think about your safety and if you are able to stay safe. Would COVID-19 vaccination increase your safety?

The risk of getting COVID-19 is higher if:

- ☐ You live in a community with a lot of COVID-19 cases
- ☐ You have regular contact with people outside your home
- ☐ You live in a crowded housing situation
- ☐ You, or a member of your household, work in a high-risk environment (e.g., you are a front-line essential worker or healthcare worker)

The risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 in pregnancy is higher if:

- ☐ You have medical problems (e.g., pre-pregnancy diabetes, pre-pregnancy high blood pressure, a compromised immune system, kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease and/or asthma)
- ☐ You are overweight
- ☐ You are a smoker
- ☐ You are 35 years of age or older
- ☐ You are in the last three months (third trimester) of your pregnancy

It's safer to get the vaccine as soon as possible, especially if you are at an even higher risk of getting COVID-19 and developing severe illness. The known risks of severe illness from COVID are greater than the known risks of the vaccine.

How can I protect myself and my baby from COVID-19?

- ☐ Wear a mask when out in public
- ☐ Wash your hands often
- ☐ Avoid crowds and practice physical distancing
- ☐ Self monitor for symptoms of COVID
- ☐ Continue receiving healthcare before, during and after your pregnancy
- ☐ **Get a COVID-19 vaccine**

If you choose to wait, you need to know that without the vaccine, you are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

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What about breastfeeding?

COVID-19 vaccines can be safely given to people who are breastfeeding; the vaccine is not detectable in your breast milk.

- Antibodies have been shown to pass in the breastmilk after maternal vaccination and may protect your baby against COVID-19.
- Receiving a COVID-19 vaccine while breastfeeding should not disrupt your breastfeeding and does not have an adverse impact on your baby.

What if I get pregnant after getting the vaccine?

If you are pregnant or become pregnant soon after getting the first dose of the vaccine, you should complete the full course and receive your second dose.

- Several studies show there is no impact of COVID vaccination prior to and at any time, in the first trimester on the risk of miscarriage or any adverse pregnancy outcome.

What if I am planning a pregnancy?

People who are planning to become pregnant are recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible. There is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine causes fertility issues. Fertility treatment is not a medical reason that prevents you from receiving a COVID vaccine.

Summary

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy is your choice.	**COVID causes more severe illness in pregnant people than in people of the same age who are not pregnant.**
The vaccines are highly effective in preventing COVID-19 infection and protecting against severe illness.	**Studies show that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are safe for pregnant and/or breastfeeding people.**

Do you have more questions?

Speak to your healthcare provider for more information.

Your feedback is important to us!

Please complete an online survey by scanning the QR code or by clicking HERE.

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For more information on the intended use of this resource and references, please go to www.PCMCH.on.ca/COVID-19Vaccine

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