

Women and the COVID-19 vaccines

Your questions answered

Jean Hailes for Women's Health has partnered with the Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre (MVEC) to answer your questions about COVID-19 vaccines and their impact on women and girls. We asked you what you wanted to know, what's confusing, and what you need to make informed decisions about your health. Here are the frequently asked questions, and the expert responses from MVEC.

Will the vaccine stop me from getting pregnant, now or in the future?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines, causes male or female infertility.

During COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials, participants became pregnant at similar rates in both the vaccine groups and placebo (no vaccine) groups.

COVID-19 vaccination of women who are planning pregnancy is safe, effective and strongly recommended.

Should I continue breastfeeding if I've had the vaccine?

Research from large clinical trials involving tens of thousands of pregnant women as well as ongoing global monitoring shows that mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) are safe for pregnant women (during any stage in pregnancy) and in breastfeeding women.

After having COVID-19 or receiving the vaccine, antibodies are made by your immune system that help the body to recognise and fight off the virus if you come into contact with it again. There is evidence that a mother's antibodies can be passed onto her baby through the placenta and via breastmilk, which will also provide protection to the infant.

It is important to be aware that women can continue to breastfeed as normal following vaccination and their ability to breastfeed will not be affected by an immunisation.

I heard the vaccine could change my period? Is that true?

Changes in menstrual patterns commonly occur for a variety of reasons such as stress and illness (including COVID-19 disease).

Formal studies on the menstrual patterns of COVID-19 vaccine recipients have not been conducted, but changes in menstrual patterns were not reported by participants in the initial vaccine clinical trials.

Vaccines are responsible for triggering an immune response and do not have any direct impact on the function of ovaries. Any changes in menstrual patterns noted are likely to be temporary.

I'm six months pregnant. Will my baby be vaccinated if I get vaccinated?

Women who receive COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy, can transfer antibodies against COVID-19 disease to their baby via breast milk and across the placenta. This may offer some protection to the baby. Studies are still ongoing to understand how much immunity is provided to the baby or how long this will last.

How do I know which vaccine is safe for my child?

COVID-19 vaccination with Spikevax (Moderna) or Comirnaty (Pfizer) are safe and currently recommended in Australia for all individuals aged 12 years or older. Full safety data is not currently available for any vaccine for children less than 12 years old.

Before being used in the community, all medications including vaccines must be widely tested (using clinical trials) to show that they are effective and safe. Extra care is taken in populations such as children and pregnant women.

Even after these trials are completed, all COVID-19 vaccines continue to be carefully monitored in Australia for safety concerns by experts including the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). This includes constant evaluation of any suspected or unexpected safety concerns.

I'm pregnant. What could happen to me or my baby if I get COVID-19?

Pregnant women are at higher risk of experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19 disease if they become infected. They are more likely to require hospitalisation and intensive care treatment, compared with non-pregnant women of the same age.

Babies whose mothers are infected with COVID-19 disease during pregnancy, are more likely to be born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) and need treatment in hospital.

COVID-19 vaccination is safe and strongly recommended for pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy to not only protect the mother but also to protect her unborn baby.

Can kids get sick from getting COVID-19?

Compared with adults, children often experience milder symptoms of COVID-19 disease, but infection still happens at similar rates, especially in adolescents. The Delta variant of COVID-19 disease is highly transmissible across all age groups, including children.

Some children may get very sick from COVID-19. Children with certain medical conditions have a greater risk of experiencing severe symptoms if they are infected with the virus. These conditions include cancers, diabetes, severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, heart disease and obesity.

COVID-19 vaccination is safe and recommended for children aged 12 years and older. It provides protection against severe COVID-19 disease and hospitalisation. Vaccination is really important for those who have medical conditions that make them more at risk of serious illness, if they are infected.

I have heard that COVID-19 vaccines can affect ovaries? Is this true?

There are no concerns that COVID-19 vaccines negatively affect fertility.

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccination is harmful to ovaries or fallopian tubes. There is also no evidence that COVID-19 mRNA from vaccines builds up or accumulates in the ovaries or affects the way they function.

COVID-19 vaccinations do not affect the quality of the eggs and or the fertilisation process.

Should I get the vaccine if I'm undergoing IVF?

Evidence from COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials demonstrates that vaccination does not affect the success of in vitro fertilisation (IVF).

There is no evidence to suggest that vaccination has any impact on egg quality, egg number, sperm, or egg fertilisation. There is no increased risk of miscarriage following vaccination.

Side effects from COVID-19 vaccines will not have any impact on fertility treatment, therefore a woman can be vaccinated at any time during her IVF journey.

The vaccines available in Australia do not contain live virus and therefore are safe for women trying to conceive, with no negative impact on mum or foetus/baby.

Do kids have any special reactions to the vaccines?

In clinical trials and AusVaxSafety data, reactions and side effects following COVID-19 vaccination are generally less common and milder in adolescents and children compared to adults. Adolescents and children can have mild reactions including pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache and fever, which usually resolve in the first three days following vaccination.

Vaccine safety services continue to monitor for any unusual reactions such as inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) after mRNA vaccines. There is no current data to suggest that this unusual reaction is more common in children under 12 years of age.

Find out more

For more information, visit jeanhailes.org.au or the Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre mvec.mcri.edu.au

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. Jean Hailes represents all women, girls and gender-diverse people.

