

COVID-19 vaccination, pregnancy & breastfeeding

mRNA COVID-19 vaccine Pfizer/BioNTech (Pfizer vaccine)

Key Information

- The COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine has been found to be highly effective in preventing serious COVID-19 illness, hospitalisation and death in pregnant women
- As a hapū māmā, you are three times more likely to be hospitalised due to COVID-19 and five times more likely to be admitted into the intensive care unit (ICU), compared to non-pregnant women
- COVID-19 increases the likelihood of complications in pregnancy, such as high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, diabetes caused by pregnancy and poor fetal growth
- There are no safety concerns regarding the Pfizer vaccination if you are pregnant, planning to be pregnant, or breastfeeding

COVID-19 disease and pregnancy

During a pregnancy, your body goes through natural changes to accommodate a growing pēpi. As your pēpi grows, your lung capacity decreases, and the amount of blood being pumped around your body increases – this means your heart needs to work harder.

As a result, you are at a higher risk of severe disease and breathing difficulties if infected with a respiratory disease, such as COVID-19 or influenza.

Babies are up to seven times more likely to be born early to mothers with COVID-19, and up to five times more likely to require neonatal intensive care when compared to babies born to mothers without the disease.

COVID-19 vaccination and pregnancy

Internationally, hundreds of millions of people have received the Pfizer vaccine, including many thousands of pregnant women.

Studies show that the Pfizer vaccine is safe for pregnant women, those planning pregnancy and for breastfeeding māmās.

How effective is the vaccination for pregnant women?

Highly effective. There is increasing evidence that the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine, when given in pregnancy, is similar to the general population. If you are fully vaccinated, the Pfizer vaccine provides you with 95% protection against COVID-19 symptoms.

In the United Kingdom, no fully vaccinated pregnant women were admitted to hospital for COVID-19.

Can I receive a COVID-19 vaccination if I'm planning to be pregnant?

Yes. If you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, you can make an informed decision to receive the Pfizer vaccine at any stage.

What can I expect after vaccination?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause potential responses related to your immune response, however, most are mild and

disappear after a few days. Common Pfizer vaccine immune responses are:

- A sore arm
- A headache
- Feeling tired
- Feeling feverish

Studies show that there is no difference in the Pfizer vaccine immune response between pregnant and non-pregnant women. Serious responses after vaccination, such as anaphylaxis (five cases per million doses), are very rare.

If you are pregnant, it is recommended that you discuss with your Doctor or midwife the best ways to relieve possible discomfort and fever following vaccination.

If you feel unwell, rest and drink plenty of water. Paracetamol is safe during pregnancy to relieve a headache or fever. If you are concerned or these last for more than 2 days, seek medical advice.

Can I breastfeed after the COVID-19 vaccination?

Yes, you can breastfeed if you have had the Pfizer vaccine during pregnancy and those who are breastfeeding can receive the Pfizer vaccine or a booster. There are no safety concerns associated with the vaccine for breastfeeding, or for your pēpi.

In fact, emerging evidence suggests that vaccination in pregnancy or while breastfeeding provides temporary COVID-19 protection for your pēpi via the whenua/placenta or antibodies in breastmilk.

Can I have a booster dose?

You can receive a booster Pfizer vaccine at any stage of pregnancy from three months after your second dose. If you received your first or second doses during your pregnancy, your booster can be given before or after your delivery, as long as there is a three-month gap after your second dose. Booster timing can be discussed with your Doctor or midwife.

Who shouldn't receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

If you have had an anaphylaxis reaction to any ingredient listed in the vaccine, or have had an anaphylactic response to a previous dose, you should not receive the Pfizer vaccine.

If you are feeling unwell or have a fever above 38°C, wait until you are feeling better to have the vaccination.

References

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