

COVID-19 VACCINATION ADVICE FOR PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN

Pregnancy is a special time for a woman, but it can also be difficult and stressful, especially with the added uncertainties around the safety of the Covid-19 vaccine.

The South African Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (SASOG) provides the following advice on the use of the Covid-19 vaccine by pregnant and breastfeeding women.



There will be a phased roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination in South Africa. Vaccine development and regulatory approval are rapidly progressing and therefore, recommendations will evolve as more information becomes available.

Most COVID vaccines have shown to be about 70-90% effective at preventing COVID-19 illness after the second dose. While considerable research has been conducted into the safety of the vaccine, there has been no testing of the vaccine in pregnancy. Animal studies however, do not indicate direct or indirect harmful effects with respect to pregnancy, embryo/fetal development, labour and delivery or post-natal development.

SASOG recommends that COVID-19 **vaccines should be offered to women at risk of severe illness following COVID infection. All pregnant women should discuss the risks and benefits** of the COVID-19 vaccination with their healthcare practitioners. These discussions should include the lack of safety data for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and that there is no known risk associated with other non-live vaccines given in pregnancy.

Vaccination is strongly encouraged for non-pregnant women contemplating pregnancy. If a woman becomes pregnant after the first dose of the COVID vaccine, the second dose should be administered as indicated.

Certain groups of pregnant and breastfeeding women should consider taking the vaccine and should speak to their Obstetrician or Gynaecologist about this.

These include women who are at a high risk of contracting Covid-19, or who may suffer serious complications if they do contract the virus, such as:

- ◆ Healthcare workers
- ◆ Essential workers (teachers, police) at the frontline who interact with the public or are in close proximity to many other people
- ◆ Women who have previously been the recipient of an organ transplant.
- ◆ Women with a weakened immune system due to another condition, such as cancer, diabetes or HIV.
- ◆ Those who have respiratory problems or suffer from a respiratory disease such as TB, cystic fibrosis or are severely asthmatic
- ◆ Known with kidney or heart disease
- ◆ Obesity (BMI > 30kg/m²)
- ◆ Smokers

Any questions or concerns you may have about being vaccinated during pregnancy or if you are breastfeeding should be thoroughly discussed with your doctor or healthcare professional, who will assist you in making your decision.