

Study recognizes best way to communicate the importance of vaccinations during pregnancy

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Vaccine hesitancy is considered one of the top 10 threats to public health by the World Health Organization. Pregnant women and newborn infants are at an increased risk for severe disease from influenza (flu) and

whooping cough, therefore improving maternal vaccination is a high priority for keeping moms and babies safe.

Why vaccinate?

Consider that a pregnant 30-year-old has a similar risk of hospitalization from flu as a 65-year-old. The flu can also lead to pregnancy complications. Between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough occur in the U.S. each year and infants younger six months have a 50 percent chance of needing to be hospitalized if they get it.

The [flu vaccine](#) decreases the risk of getting the flu, and also decreases the risk of being hospitalized if one does get the flu. Whooping cough vaccination during pregnancy allows protective antibodies to pass to the baby, which protects the baby until the baby is old enough to be vaccinated. Unfortunately, only about half of pregnant individuals receive these vaccines. Rates are even lower among women of color.

Motivation to vaccinate

A new study asked [pregnant women](#) what information they found most important when deciding whether to accept recommended flu and whooping cough vaccines. The women felt [vaccine safety](#) and protection of the infant was the most significant consideration and these messages were most impactful when delivered by trusted health care providers.

A group of researchers from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) interviewed 28 pregnant women ranging in age from 18 to 40 years old. Nearly 60 percent of participants identified as non-Hispanic Black or African American, 35 percent as Hispanic/LatinX, and four percent as Asian. Most of the participants felt that vaccines were beneficial and had received routine vaccines. Most heard about

vaccinations from multiple sources, but trusted their healthcare providers most as a source of [vaccine](#) information. "Participants felt that the most important messages to encourage maternal vaccination were that maternal vaccination protects the baby after birth and maternal vaccination is safe for both mother and baby. They also found messages about severe disease among pregnant individuals to be frightening and less motivating than information about safety and protecting their [babies](#)," explained corresponding author Rebecca Perkins, MD, associate professor of obstetrics & gynecology at BUSM.

According to the researchers, many vaccine discussions and public campaigns focus on the severe diseases that can occur if one does not accept vaccines. "Positive messaging around safety and protection were more motivating than fear-based tactics. This has relevant for vaccine information both at the level of one-on-one discussions as well as [public health](#) campaigns," said Perkins, who also is a gynecologist at Boston Medical Center.

These findings appear online in the journal *Women's Health Issues*.

More information: Taylor L. Fuss et al, Attitudes and Communication Preferences for Vaccines among Pregnant Women Receiving Care at a Safety-net Hospital, *Women's Health Issues* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.whi.2021.09.004](#)

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