

How COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy may protect babies after birth

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Getting vaccinated for COVID-19 during pregnancy might protect not only the pregnant woman, but also the baby after birth. That's what a recent Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study suggests.

Data show that being vaccinated, even before pregnancy, can prevent COVID-19 hospitalizations among infants 6 months and younger.

Dr. Myra Wick, a Mayo Clinic OB-GYN, explains why the findings are significant.

The study looked at two groups of infants 6 months and younger who had been admitted to the hospital. One group was admitted for COVID-19 infection. The second was admitted for various other reasons.

Researchers then looked at the vaccination statuses of the mothers during pregnancy to see if being vaccinated provided some protection after delivery for the infants. The babies whose mothers were vaccinated during pregnancy were found to be protected for up to six months after birth.

Q. How do babies gain this protection?

A. "When the mom is vaccinated, she produces antibodies, and these antibodies can be transferred through the cord blood to the baby and provide what we call 'passive immunization.' The antibodies transferred from the mom protect the infant against COVID infection."

Dr. Wick says one of the best examples of this, prior to COVID, is the tetanus diphtheria and acellular pertussis booster, or Tdap.

"We vaccinate all women who are pregnant with Tdap, regardless of when they were vaccinated previously," says Dr. Wick. "Mom produces an increased number of antibodies in response to the vaccination. These are transferred to the fetus and provide protection against pertussis (whooping cough)."

Q. Why are these findings significant?

A. "It just gives us another reason to encourage moms to vaccinate during pregnancy. We know that moms who are pregnant and get COVID-19 are at increased risk for needing hospitalization, ICU care, ventilation, even death. And that data has been pretty well established. Those are all reasons to be vaccinated, and now knowing that there could be protection for the baby, as well, is very exciting. And seeing that protection up to six months — that's wonderful."

Q. Guidance for those who have not been vaccinated for COVID-19, and are pregnant or plan to become pregnant

A. "Vaccinate. We know that there aren't any adverse effects. There are over 185,000 women enrolled in the V-Safe Program, which is a tracking program through the CDC after COVID vaccination, who have reported that they were pregnant at the time of receiving the COVID vaccine. There haven't been any increased number of adverse events or effects in women who have received the vaccine. We also know that there aren't any issues with fertility. There aren't any issues with miscarriage associated with the vaccine."

COVID-19 vaccination during [pregnancy](#) is recommended to prevent severe illness and death in women who are pregnant. Infants are also at risk for COVID-19 associated complications, including respiratory failure and other life-threatening complications.

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