

Studies show that COVID-19 vaccine protects pregnant women, newborns

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Pregnant women continue to have reservations about getting vaccinated against COVID-19 despite research indicating the safety of the vaccines and the protection they may offer their unborn children.

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that more than 80% of babies hospitalized with COVID-19 were born to women who were not vaccinated during pregnancy. In contrast, the study showed that nearly 60% of the newborns of vaccinated mothers were protected from the illness; blood tests revealed they had detectable antibodies against the virus that causes COVID-19.

"We are taking this disease and pregnancy very seriously," said Mariam Naqvi, MD, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist at Cedars-Sinai.

"Pregnant women who get seriously ill from COVID-19 are at higher risk of ending up in the intensive care unit and of dying. Their babies are also more likely to be born prematurely, with complications," said Naqvi, an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology.

According to the latest numbers available from the CDC, nearly 62% of pregnant women in the U.S. received at least one dose of the vaccine before or during their pregnancy. Among all U.S. adults, more than 77% have received at least one shot.

While vaccination rates have steadily improved, Black and Latinx people—including pregnant women—are still less likely to get vaccinated than their white and Asian American counterparts.

In communities of color, the overall vaccination rate—including among pregnant women—remains lower. Just over 57% of Black adults and about 67% of Latinx adults have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Among Black pregnant women, the vaccination rate is even lower, at 54%. Vaccine hesitancy and mistrust remain obstacles to improving vaccination coverage of these communities that are also at higher risk for getting seriously ill from COVID-19.

"The incidents of government-sanctioned medical experimentation on

certain communities, such as the Tuskegee study in which Black victims of sexually transmitted diseases were not offered treatment, can leave people suspicious," said Kimberly Gregory, MD, MPH, director of Maternal-Fetal Medicine at Cedars-Sinai. "Also, in general, women have been cautioned about taking medicines during pregnancy."

However, specialists who care for pregnant women and their unborn children emphasize that the vaccination research shows more benefits than risks.

"I think that people need to understand and appreciate the life-threatening dangers that COVID-19 can present. You don't necessarily have to be the first person in line. But with over 218 million people vaccinated in the country, we have so much more safety data now and that should be reassuring for people," said Gregory, also the vice chair, Women's Healthcare Quality and Performance Improvement in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

That good research convinced Naqvi to get the vaccine when she was 34 weeks pregnant with her second child.

"I wanted to stay safe, and I knew there was a surge ongoing, so I decided to get the vaccine," Naqvi said. "I got the second dose actually after I had my baby and during the breastfeeding period. I feel like it was a great decision. My daughter is healthy, she's beautiful. She, thank God, has never gotten COVID-19."

Provided by Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

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