

Illinois county reverses decision; will allow pregnant and lactating women to get COVID-19 vaccines

8 February 2021, by Alison Bowen



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Kane County, Illinois, officials have reversed a policy that denied COVID-19 vaccines to pregnant and lactating women.

In a statement released Friday, the Kane County Health Department issued a clarification saying it would provide vaccines to pregnant and lactating [women](#). The [decision](#) came after consultations with the Illinois Department of Public Health, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC and ACOG have been recommending that pregnant and lactating women have access to vaccines.

In a statement released this week, ACOG cited reports of pregnant patients being denied vaccines and called this "concerning" and "unethical."

Because [pregnant women](#) are at an elevated risk

of getting severely ill should they contract the virus, denying them the vaccines not only "violates their bodily autonomy," the group said, it "also puts them at risk of severe outcomes and death related to COVID-19 illness." Black and Latina women are especially at risk.

Because pregnant and lactating women were left out of initial vaccine trials, data on how a vaccine might affect them has been limited. But experts agree that their risk of severe illness, should they get COVID-19, generally outweighs the theoretical risks from a vaccine. Patients should be able to make their own decision, according to ACOG, and those who do not want a vaccine should feel supported.

ACOG recommends that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding discuss vaccines with their provider. Families have been weighing factors like their own exposure to the virus, ability to stay home, individual and family health risks, and personal preferences.

Illinois mom and health care worker Kate Raess told the Tribune that after careful consideration because she is breastfeeding, she had chosen to get a vaccine only to arrive at a Kane County location to be told the county had decided lactating women would not get one.

"It was a really emotional decision," said Raess, a clinical therapist who wanted to feel she was protecting herself and her family, and would be able to see at-risk clients in person.

Raess added, "The decision was bigger than myself. It was about my son, it was about my daughter and it was about my clients, and to have that opportunity to be safe."

Being told she was not able to get a [vaccine](#), she said, brought "this internalized sense of shame and judgment—that a county board felt that I couldn't make this decision, and they would make it for me."

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