Overview

- COVID-19 infection and pregnancy
- COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy
COVID-19 and pregnancy

- Pregnant women with COVID-19 have a higher risk of certain complications compared to non-pregnant women with COVID-19 of the same age:
  - increased risk (about 5 times higher) of needing admission to hospital.
  - increased risk (about 2-3 times higher) of needing admission to ICU
  - increased risk (about 3 times higher) of needing invasive ventilation

- Increased risk of pre-eclampsia (8% vs 4.4%) - higher in symptomatic women
COVID-19 during pregnancy also increases complications for the baby:

- slightly increased risk (about 1.5 times higher) of being born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
- increased risk (about 3 times higher) of needing admission to a hospital NICU
- Increased risk of stillbirth in some studies

Some of these risks may be due to:

- A sick mother who needs to give birth early
- Women unable access care-individual and service level
Pregnant women may have more severe illness from COVID-19 compared to pregnant women without these conditions.

The conditions are:
- Being older than 35 years
- Being overweight or obese (body mass index above 30 kg/m²)
- Having pre-existing (pre-pregnancy) high blood pressure
- Having pre-existing (pre-pregnancy) diabetes (type 1 or type 2)

Other conditions:
- Living or working in a community with high numbers of COVID-19 cases
- Living or working in a community with low levels of COVID-19 vaccination
- Working in places where it is difficult or not possible to keep at least 6 feet apart from people who might be sick
Vaccination in pregnancy

• Vaccination for COVID-19 is pregnancy is recommended

• The vaccines are safe and effective

• The vaccines do not contain live virus – they just contain a recipe to make your body create antibodies so you can fight COVID-19

• "When women take the vaccine, they don’t just create antibodies for themselves - they also transmit it to their children or their unborn child so they get that layer of protection"

• Head of Fiji’s vaccination taskforce, Dr Rachel Devi
COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy – WHO recommendation

• WHO recommends the use of the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnant women when the benefits of vaccination to the pregnant woman outweigh the potential risks

• WHO does not recommend pregnancy testing prior to vaccination

• WHO does not recommend delaying pregnancy or terminating pregnancy because of vaccination

• COVID-19 vaccines will not cause fertility problems in women or men
You have access to different vaccines across the Pacific

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Side effects

• Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects

• These are usually mild and do not last long – and are often less in pregnancy

• Very common side effects 1-2 days after include: pain or tenderness in your arm where you had your injection, feeling tired and headaches, aches and chills.

• You may also have flu like symptoms and experiences episodes of shivering or shaking for a day or two

• If you develop a fever, you can rest and take paracetamol, which is safe in pregnancy.
Rare side effect with AZ

- **Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)**
- TTS is currently estimated to affect 3 in 100,000 people
- Death linked to the AZ vaccine in Australia equals approximately 1 in a million

- 4 days to 4 weeks after vaccination
- A new, severe headache which is not helped by usual painkillers or is getting worse and may be accompanied by:
  - blurred vision, nausea and vomiting
  - difficulty with speech
  - weakness, drowsiness or seizures
- New, unexplained pinprick bruising or bleeding
- Shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling or persistent abdominal pain
Situation in countries with Astra-Zeneca vaccine – Papua New Guinea context

• The PNG O&G Society advised the government advisory group in July to make COVID-19 (AZ) vaccine permissable for all pregnant and lactating women

• Last week, the PNG O&G Society recommended COVID-19 vaccination (AZ) for all pregnant women

• A vaccination centre in the ANC at PMGH has been set up so that women can get the vaccine as part of their ANC
  • Every woman is being personally counselled now in PMGH ANC that it is advisable for them to receive COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy because of the increased risk of maternal morbidity and death in the third trimester

• There have been 4 maternal deaths at PMGH associated with severe COVID complications since February this year
Can breastfeeding women be vaccinated?

- **YES**

- It is safe for breastfeeding women to get the COVID-19 vaccine

- The COVID-19 vaccine itself does not go into breastmilk – only the antibodies that are protective

- No need to delay or stop breastfeeding when getting vaccinated
Will the COVID-19 vaccine affect fertility?

- NO

- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine will not affect fertility.

- Women trying to conceive may be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccines

- There is no reason to delay pregnancy after completing the vaccine series.
Does the COVID-19 vaccine affect pregnant women’s immune systems?

- **YES**

- The vaccine activates the immune system to help patients fight the viral infection.

- That is what is needed
Is there a risk of miscarriage after being vaccinated?

• NO

• Results from published studies suggest that there is no increased risk of miscarriage in women who receive COVID-19 vaccines
Is there a risk to the baby?

- Antibodies from the COVID-19 vaccine cross the placenta
  - *The COVID-19 vaccine does not cross the placenta – only the antibodies that are protective*

- Antibodies may provide the baby with some protection against COVID-19 for the first few months of life

- COVID-19 does not cause abnormalities in the baby
Can I get COVID-19 from the coronavirus vaccine?

•  NO

•  You cannot catch COVID-19 from the currently available vaccines

•  You may experience mild, temporary side effects, but this is an indication of the immune response to the vaccination, not COVID-19.
Should all midwives get vaccinated?

• YES

• Protect yourself from getting sick from COVID-19
• Protect the woman you care for – less likely to transmit if vaccinated
• Protect people in the hospital – especially those who have other conditions
• Protect your family and the community
• Be a role model in your community
What can midwives do?
Talking with pregnant women – use every opportunity

**ASK**
- Where is she up to in her decision making?
- What does she know already? What else does she need to know?

**ACKNOWLEDGE**
- It is normal to be concerned or uncertain

**ADVISE**
- Getting vaccinated in pregnancy is safe and important – protect yourself, your family and your community

**ASSIST**
- Help her to find and book in to the vaccination centre
WHO SHOULD HAVE THE CONVERSATION?

- It's our job and part of our responsibility as midwives
- Don't wait for someone else to have the conversation
- We can and will make a difference
- Remember - we regularly discuss vaccination against influenza, pertussis and hepatitis B. COVID-19 vaccination is to be routinely offered and recommended.
Australian College of Midwives e-learning course

- Free online course on COVID-19 vaccination
- Available for all health professionals

- [http://acmcovid19info.org/](http://acmcovid19info.org/)