COVID-19 Vaccination for Pregnant People to Prevent Serious Illness, Deaths, and Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes from COVID-19

Summary
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends urgent action to increase Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccination among people who are pregnant, recently pregnant (including those who are lactating), who are trying to become pregnant now, or who might become pregnant in the future.

In addition to the risks of severe illness and death for pregnant and recently pregnant people, there is an increased risk for adverse pregnancy and neonatal outcomes, including preterm birth and admission of their neonate(s) to an intensive care unit (ICU). Other adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as stillbirth, have been reported.

Despite the known risks of COVID-19, as of September 18, 2021, 31.0% of pregnant people were fully vaccinated before or during their pregnancy.1 In addition, there are racial and ethnic disparities in vaccination coverage for pregnant people.

This Health Advisory is a call for healthcare providers:

- To communicate the risks of COVID-19, the benefits of vaccination, and information on the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy.
- To strongly recommend that people who are pregnant, recently pregnant (including those who are lactating), who are trying to become pregnant now, or who might become pregnant in the future receive one of the authorized or approved COVID-19 vaccines as soon as possible.

Background
As of September 27, 2021, more than 125,000 laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases have been reported in pregnant people, including more than 22,000 hospitalized cases and 161 deaths.2 The highest number of COVID-19-related deaths in pregnant people (n=22) in a single
month of the pandemic was reported in August 2021. Data from the COVID-19-Associated
Hospitalization Surveillance Network (COVID-NET) in 2021 indicate that approximately 97% of
pregnant people hospitalized (either for illness or for labor and delivery) with confirmed SARS-
CoV-2 infection were unvaccinated.3

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for pregnant people. CDC recommends COVID-19
vaccination for all people aged 12 years and older, including people who are pregnant, recently
pregnant (including those who are lactating), who are trying to get pregnant now, or who might
become pregnant in the future.4 CDC recommendations align with those from professional
medical organizations serving people who are pregnant, including the American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Accumulating data
provide evidence of both the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy.
CDC strongly recommends COVID-19 vaccination either before or during pregnancy, because
the benefits of vaccination for both pregnant persons and their fetus/infant outweigh known or
potential risks. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine can prevent severe illness, death, and pregnancy
complications related to COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccination coverage for pregnant people remains low. Despite recommendations for
vaccination, uptake of COVID-19 vaccination by pregnant people has been lower than that of
nonpregnant people.5 In addition, vaccination coverage for pregnant people differs by race and
ethnicity, with vaccination coverage being lowest for non-Hispanic Black pregnant people
(15.6%) as of September 18, 2021.1 Although the proportion of fully vaccinated pregnant
people has increased to 31.0% (as of September 18, 2021), the majority of pregnant people
remain unprotected against COVID-19, and significant disparities exist in vaccination coverage
by race and ethnicity.

Pregnant and recently pregnant people with COVID-19 are at increased risk of severe illness,
death, and pregnancy complications. Pregnant and recently pregnant people with COVID-19 are
at increased risk for severe illness when compared with non-pregnant people. Severe illness
includes illness that requires hospitalization, intensive care unit (ICU) admission, mechanical
ventilation, or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), or illness that results in death.
Although the absolute risk is low, compared with non-pregnant symptomatic people,
symptomatic pregnant people have more than a twofold increased risk of requiring ICU
admission, invasive ventilation, and ECMO, and a 70% increased risk of death.6 Pregnant people
with COVID-19 are also at increased risk for preterm birth and some data suggest an increased
risk for other adverse pregnancy complications and outcomes, such as preeclampsia,
coagulopathy, and stillbirth, compared with pregnant people without COVID-19.7-10 Neonates
born to people with COVID-19 are also at increased risk for admission to the neonatal ICU.9-11
In addition, although rare, pregnant people with COVID-19 can transmit infection to their
neonates; among neonates born to women with COVID-19 during pregnancy, 1–4% of neonates tested were positive by rRT-PCR.12-13

**Recommendations for Healthcare Providers**

- Ensure all clinical staff are aware of the recommendation for vaccination of people before and during pregnancy and the serious risks of COVID-19 to pregnant and recently pregnant people and their fetuses/infants.
- Increase outreach efforts to encourage, recommend, and offer vaccination to people who are pregnant, recently pregnant (including those who are lactating), who are trying to get pregnant now, or who might become pregnant in the future. A strong recommendation from a healthcare provider is a critical factor in COVID-19 vaccine acceptance and can make a meaningful difference to protect the health of pregnant and recently pregnant people and their fetuses/infants from COVID-19.
- For healthcare providers who see patients who are pregnant, recently pregnant (including those who are lactating), who are trying to get pregnant now, or who might become pregnant in the future:
  - Review patients’ COVID-19 vaccination status at each pre- and post-natal visit and discuss COVID-19 vaccination with those who are unvaccinated.
  - Reach out to your patients with messages encouraging and recommending the critical need for vaccination.
  - Remind patients that vaccination is recommended even for those with prior COVID-19 infections. Studies have shown that vaccination provides increased protection in people who have recovered from COVID-19.
  - Support efforts to ensure people receiving the first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (i.e., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna) return for their second dose to complete the series as close as possible to the recommended interval.
    - Consider a booster dose in eligible pregnant persons.4
  - Communicate accurate information about COVID-19 vaccines and confront misinformation with evidence-based messaging from credible sources. For example, there is currently no evidence that any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems in women or men.
- Become a COVID-19 vaccine provider and vaccinate patients during their visit. More information can be found at How to Enroll as a COVID-19 Vaccination Provider.

**Resources for Additional Information**

- [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines Currently Approved or Authorized in the United States](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccines While Pregnant or Breastfeeding](#)
• **COVID-19 Vaccines for People Who Would Like to Have a Baby**
• **COVID-19 among Pregnant and Recently Pregnant People**
• **COVID Data Tracker**
  o **Vaccination Among Pregnant People**
  o **Data on COVID-19 during Pregnancy: Severity of Maternal Illness**
• **Toolkit for Pregnant People and New Parents**
• **Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines**

**References**

1. COVID Data Tracker. Vaccinations Among Pregnant People. (accessed September 27, 2021)


DHEC contact information for reportable diseases and reporting requirements

Reporting of SARS-CoV2 laboratory results (positive, negative, and indeterminate), whole genome sequencing results, and COVID-19 associated deaths is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2021 List of Reportable Conditions available at: https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

Regional Public Health Offices – 2021
Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region

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For information on reportable conditions, see https://www.scdhec.gov/ReportableConditions

Categories of Health Alert messages:
Health Alert Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
Health Advisory Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
Health Update Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.
Info Service Provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.