

# COVID-19 Vaccines during Pregnancy, Breastfeeding and while Planning a Pregnancy Toolkit for Healthcare Providers

The Women's and Infants' Safe Transitions Steering Committee identified a need for this toolkit to ensure all healthcare providers working with pregnant individuals have up to date and consistent information about COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy.

Healthcare providers can have a significant influence on vaccine confidence because they are often seen as trusted sources of health information. This toolkit provides turnkey resources for healthcare providers for increasing knowledge, building vaccine confidence, and promoting vaccination in individuals who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

This toolkit was adapted from a resource created by [Doctors of BC](#)

**Updated:** October 26, 2021

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Please adapt these resources to meet your needs. If you require other supports for your patients, you can email [vaccineconfidence@hamilton.ca](mailto:vaccineconfidence@hamilton.ca) your request.

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## Evidence on COVID-19 Vaccines in Pregnancy

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
  - [COVID-19 Considerations for Obstetric-Gynecologic Care: Practice Advisory](#)
- Born Ontario
  - [BORN-COVID-19-Vaccination-During-Pregnancy-in-Ontario-Report-2---FINAL.pdf \(bornontario.ca\)](#)
- CDC
  - [COVID-19 Vaccines while Pregnant or Breastfeeding](#)
- Hamilton Health Sciences
  - [Pregnant? The time is now to get your COVID vaccine.](#)
- National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)
  - [Recommendations on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines](#) (pg. 61-62)
- New England Journal of Medicine.
  - [Preliminary findings of mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine Safety in Pregnant Persons](#) (Shumabukuro et al.)
- Ontario Ministry of Health
  - [COVID-19 Vaccinations Recommendations for Special Populations](#) (pg. 2)
  - [Vaccination in Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Patient Decision-Making Tool](#)
- Public Health Ontario
  - [Evidence Brief: Vaccines and Fertility](#)
- Science Table COVID-19 Advisory for Ontario
  - [The Incidence, Severity, and Management of COVID-19 in Critically Ill Pregnant Individuals](#)
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
  - [SOGC Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccine Resources for Professionals – SOGC Resources & Other Resources](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy \(for patients\)](#)

## Key Messages from Ontario Ministry of Health



COVID-19 Vaccine -  
Pregnant Individuals -

## Medical Exemptions

- PHS Medical Advisory: COVID-19 Vaccine Contraindications and Medical Exemptions (August 30, 2021)



MEMO-COVID-19  
Vaccine Contraindicat

- [Focused Covid Communication: COVID-19 Vaccine Medical Exemptions](#)  
(University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy)

## Frequently Asked Questions

- [Should pregnant people get the vaccine? At what point in pregnancy?](#)
- [What are the benefits of getting the vaccine during pregnancy?](#)
- [Are there any risks to getting the vaccine during pregnancy?](#)
- [Are vaccines safe for those who are breastfeeding?](#)
- [Does the vaccine impact fertility?](#)
- [Additional FAQs](#)

### Should pregnant people get the vaccine? At what point in pregnancy?

- All pregnant individuals in the authorized age group (born in 2009 or earlier) are eligible **and recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any stage in pregnancy** ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#)).
- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine while you're pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive is safe and highly recommended by:
  - the Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health (PCMCH)
  - Ontario Society of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (OSOG)
  - the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC)
  - National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)
  - many other national and international organizations ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))
- Pregnant individuals should be offered vaccination at any time during pregnancy or while breastfeeding if no contraindications exist ([SOGC](#)).
- COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can be severe (increased risk for hospitalization, ICU admission, mechanical ventilation and death compared to non-pregnant individuals) and the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#)).

### What are the benefits of getting the vaccine during pregnancy?

- The benefits of getting vaccinated to prevent potential complications in pregnancy far outweigh the risks. Not only will the vaccine protect you from COVID-19 infection, it will reduce the risk of severe illness and complications related to COVID-19 infections in pregnancy. And, studies suggest the antibodies your body develops following vaccination will pass to your baby, which may keep them safe after birth. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))

- COVID-19 infection in pregnancy increases the risk of medical complications and death. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))
- Pregnancy women who contract COVID-19 are:
  - Five times more likely to be hospitalized and spend 3.73 days longer in hospital
  - 10 times more likely to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU)
  - More likely to suffer from severe illness
  - More likely to require ventilation/life support breathing ([Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table](#))
- COVID-19 infection in pregnancy significantly increases the risk of:
  - Stillbirth
  - Premature birth
  - High blood pressure
  - Caesarean delivery
  - Low birth weight
- There is also an increased risk that the baby will need to be admitted to neonatal intensive care. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))
- “While the rate of COVID in pregnancy is not substantially higher than amongst those who are not pregnant, the effect of COVID can be more severe for several reasons, one being the impact on the lungs with the baby pressing on your diaphragm. Sometimes we need to deliver the baby earlier than planned to balance the risks and well-being of both the pregnant person and the baby. We have seen [pregnant people require critical care](#) when in healthy times, we wouldn’t have this” (Dr. Packer, [Hamilton Health Sciences](#)).

### **Are there any risks to getting the vaccine during pregnancy?**

- There is no evidence to suggest that taking the COVID-19 vaccine will impact your pregnancy.
  - Several studies with more than 17,000 pregnant women have shown that vaccination immediately prior to and/or during pregnancy has no impact on pregnancy outcomes (i.e. no change in the rate of miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, growth restriction, high blood pressure during pregnancy, medical complications of pregnancy or maternal death).
  - A study of more than 35,000 pregnant and/or breastfeeding women who were monitored at the time of COVID-19 vaccination found no difference in the rate

of side effects compared with non-pregnant individuals. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))

- Similar to medications and other vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccines can cause side effects. Most side effects are mild and resolve within a few days after vaccination. They may include:
  - soreness at the injection site on your arm
  - tiredness
  - chills
  - a mild headache

These types of side effects are expected and simply mean the vaccine is working to produce protection. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))

### **Are vaccines safe for those who are breastfeeding?**

- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine while breastfeeding is safe, effective and highly recommended.
- Vaccines protect you from COVID-19 infection and help prevent you from passing it to your baby or other family members.
- You can continue breastfeeding after getting vaccinated; the vaccine is not detectable in breast milk.
- Antibodies have been shown to pass in the breastmilk after maternal vaccination and may protect your baby against COVID-19.
- Studies show that receiving a COVID-19 vaccine while breastfeeding does not disrupt your breastfeeding and does not have an adverse impact on your baby. ([Ontario Ministry of Health](#))

### **Does the vaccine impact fertility?**

- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine while planning to become pregnant is safe, effective and highly recommended.
- COVID-19 vaccines do not cause male or female infertility and there is no evidence to suggest that they will cause infertility.
- Get both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine before getting pregnant to protect you and your future baby from the increased risks associated with COVID-19 infections in pregnancy.

[\(Ontario Ministry of Health\)](#)

- There is no scientific reason that the COVID-19 vaccines would impact fertility for those people trying to get pregnant. While fertility was not specifically studied in the clinical trials of the vaccine, no loss of fertility has been reported among trial participants or among the millions who have received the vaccines to date, and no signs of infertility appeared in animal studies ([American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#)).
- Among all randomized-control vaccine trials, less than 50 vaccinated participants reported pregnancies. No adverse outcomes were identified ([SOGC](#)).

### Additional FAQs

- Centre for Effective Practice: [COVID-19: Vaccines | Centre for Effective Practice - Digital Tools](#)
- City of Hamilton:
  - [Frequently Asked Questions,](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccine Questions and Answers \(video\)](#)
  - [Translated FAQ resources](#)
- Ontario Ministry of Health: [COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy](#)
- Prenatal Screening Ontario: [Information on the COVID-19 vaccine and pregnancy](#)
- SOGC:
  - [COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy FAQ for Health Care Providers](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy: FAQ for Patients](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccine myths and facts](#)
- Sunnybrook Health Sciences [Pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive? Answers to your COVID-19 vaccine questions](#)

## Ideas to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence

- Targeted calls and/or discussions with pregnant individuals to answer their questions and increase motivation. Incorporating [Motivational Interviewing](#) techniques can be helpful. Conversations could include:
  - a review of the potential risks and benefits of the vaccine,
  - a review of the risk of acquiring a COVID-19 infection during pregnancy,
  - a review of the potential risks /consequences associated with a COVID-19 infection during pregnancy, and
  - an acknowledgment of the limited evidence from clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines in the pregnant population.
- Ask every patient that you have an interaction with if they have received their COVID-19 vaccine. Consider adopting or adapting the City of Hamilton's Minimal Contact COVID-19 Vaccine Intervention. The MCI Policy and Procedure, Clinical Protocol, and Quick Reference Tool are included below.



Minimal Contact  
COVID-19 Vaccine Int



Minimal Contact  
COVID-19 Vaccine Int



MCI Quick Reference  
Tool (4A).pdf

- Host an online discussion or Q&A session for patients
- Participate in media interviews
- Share information and resources (see Resources section below):
  - Display COVID-19 vaccine and pregnancy resources in your clinic
  - Share social media messages and campaigns
  - Add information to your website



## Resources to share

These are examples of resources. Please adapt these resources to meet your needs. If you require other supports for your patients, you can email [vaccineconfidence@hamilton.ca](mailto:vaccineconfidence@hamilton.ca) your request.

- [Voicemail Script](#)
- [Text Message Script](#)
- [Sample Email Message](#)
- [Sample Website Post](#)
- [Ministry of Health Campaign Resources](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Fact Sheets](#)
- [Social Media](#)
- [Other Health Promotion Materials](#)
- [Other Vaccine Confidence Resources](#)

### Voicemail Script

- If you are calling about the COVID-19 vaccine, be advised that everyone who will be 12 years of age or older before the end of 2021 can receive a COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario. Pregnant individuals who will be 12 years of age or older before the end of 2021 are recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any stage in pregnancy.
- All of the approved mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have a high efficacy rate against severe disease and hospitalization.
- For vaccine clinic locations and hours of operation visit [www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](http://www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine) or call the Provincial call centre at 1-888-999-6488.
- If you have specific health questions and need some more information to help you make an informed choice about the vaccine, please leave a message for your health care provider.
- We encourage you to continue following Ontario Ministry of Health guidance on physical distancing and wearing a mask or face covering.
- Thank you and stay safe.

### Text Message Script

Sample text: *“Pregnant individuals who will be 12 years of age or older before the end of 2021 are recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any*

*stage in pregnancy. To learn how to get your vaccine or find answers to your vaccine questions visit [www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](http://www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine).”*

## Sample Email Message

### COVID-19 Vaccine Update

Dear (insert name),

Important information for patients of (insert physician name or clinic name):

Pregnant individuals who will be 12 years of age or older before the end of 2021 are recommended to be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any stage in pregnancy.

COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can be severe. Seven to fifteen percent of pregnant individuals with COVID-19 will experience moderate to severe disease requiring hospitalization. Canadian and international data suggest that pregnant individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection have a higher risk of ICU admission and mechanical ventilation.

All of the mRNA vaccines approved for use in Canada are effective at decreasing severe illness and hospitalization associated with COVID-19. In Hamilton, over 84% of those eligible have already received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine as of October 14, 2021. In Ontario, as of June 30, 2021, 39,985 individuals received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy.

For vaccine clinic locations and hours of operation visit [www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](http://www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine) or call the Provincial call centre at 1-888-999-6488.

If you have questions about COVID-19 vaccines, visit Hamilton Public Health Services' website at [www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions). For more specific questions about the vaccine and your health concerns, call our office at (xxx) xxx-xxxx (insert clinic phone number).

Thank you for all that you are doing to keep our community safe. Please continue to do everything you can to stop the spread of the virus. This means continuing to follow the Ontario Ministry of Health guidance on physical distancing and wearing a face covering.

Sincerely,

(insert email signature)

## Sample Website Post

It is recommended that pregnant individuals be vaccinated as soon as possible, at any stage in pregnancy, as COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can be severe.

- COVID-19 infection in pregnancy increases the risk of medical complications and death.
- Pregnant women who contract COVID-19 are:
  - Five times more likely to be hospitalized and spend 3.73 days longer in hospital
  - 10 times more likely to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU)
  - More likely to suffer from severe illness
  - More likely to require ventilation/life support breathing

To learn how to get your vaccine or find answers to your vaccine questions visit [www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](http://www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine)

## Ministry of Health campaign resources

- Includes English and French poster and social media graphics for preconception, pregnancy and breastfeeding populations.  
<https://cityshare.hamilton.ca/s/3i2q8mpQggNQxCr>

## Videos

- 19 to Zero: [COVID-19 Vaccines, Fertility and Menstruation](#)
- 19 to Zero: [COVID-19 Vaccines and Pregnancy](#)
- 19 to Zero: [COVID-19 Vaccines During Postpartum and Breastfeeding](#)
- [Drs. Packer and Costescu \(HHS\): Getting vaccinated while pregnant](#)
- Government of Canada *Ask the Experts COVID-19 Vaccine Questions*
  - [Can the COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility?](#)
- [Video from Ontario health care providers](#) (English, French, Arabic, Cantonese, Farsi, Mandarin, Spanish, Tamil, Vietnamese, Yoruba)

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## Fact Sheets




- PIECE (Yale University): [COVID-19 Vaccines Pregnancy & Breastfeeding](#)
- Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health: [PCMCH-COVID-19-Vaccine-Pregnancy-Information-Sheet-2021Oct25\\_v4.pdf](#)
- SOGC: [COVID-19 Vaccine myths and facts \(sogc.org\)](#)


## Social Media graphics

- City of Hamilton digital graphics (Instagram & Twitter)

### COVID-19 Vaccines in Pregnancy

Pregnant people are at increased risk for hospitalization, ICU admission, being on a ventilator, and death

-  COVID-19 vaccines are recommended at any stage in pregnancy
-  COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at reducing the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death
-  Can help prevent pregnancy complications for parent and baby

[hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](https://hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine) 

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Can help prevent pregnancy complications for parent and baby

[hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine](https://hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine)



- [PIECE Instagram series](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health Social Media](#)

### Other Health Promotion Materials

- McMaster Department of Family Medicine created “I got my COVID-19 Vaccine” buttons for staff to wear. Designs and details here:



Buttons From  
McMaster.docx

- [Ontario Ministry of Health Poster](#)
- [SOGC Poster](#)

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**Other Vaccine Confidence Resources:**

- BC Centres for Disease Control
  - [Immunization Communication Tool 2021: A Resource for Health Care Providers](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - [Vaccinate with Confidence \(website\)](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada
  - [COVID-19 Vaccination Resources: Tool Kit for Health Care Providers](#)