



BUSINESS FOR SA | COVID-19

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## FACT SHEET: Pregnancy and the Covid-19 vaccine

### **Concern #1: Covid-19 vaccines aren't safe because they could affect my fertility**

**THE TRUTH:** Covid-19 vaccines encourage your body to create antibodies against the spike protein found on the surface of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19. This “teaches” your immune system what it should look out for – and then to fight any virus that has that specific spike protein on it.

This myth seems to have arisen out of a false report on social media that claimed that the spike protein on this coronavirus was the same as

another spike protein called syncytin-1, which is involved in the growth and attachment of the placenta during pregnancy. However, the two spike proteins are completely different, so women's fertility won't be affected by the vaccine, including if you're undergoing fertility treatment.

When Pfizer was testing its vaccine, 23 of the women volunteers became pregnant. Only one suffered a pregnancy loss, but she was part of the control group, which means she received the placebo. She did not receive the vaccine.

### **Concern #2: Pregnant and breastfeeding women weren't part of the original trials, so the Covid-19 vaccine isn't safe**

**THE TRUTH:** All trials exclude pregnant and breastfeeding people from their first rounds of testing – it's standard practice. However, based on how Covid-19 vaccines work in the body, experts believe they are unlikely to pose a risk for people who are pregnant.

They are now doing studies to confirm this, but thousands of pregnant and breastfeeding women have already received Covid-19 vaccines as part of the global vaccine roll-out programmes and the vaccines have been found to be safe in pregnant and breastfeeding women.

In addition, while the vaccines were being tested, no safety concerns were found in animal studies for Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Johnson & Johnson vaccines. Plus, Ebola vaccines that use the same mechanism as the J&J Covid-19 vaccine have been given to pregnant people in all trimesters of pregnancy in a large-scale Ebola vaccination trial.

Finally, the benefits of receiving a Covid-19 vaccine also outweigh any known or potential risks of vaccination during pregnancy.



**Concern #3: Am I at higher risk of severe disease if I catch Covid-19?**

**THE TRUTH:** If you are unvaccinated, definitely. Pregnant and recently pregnant people are at an increased risk for severe illness from Covid-19 compared with non-pregnant people. Severe illness means you are sick enough to be hospitalised, possibly in ICU, might need a ventilator or special equipment to breathe, or be sick enough that you die.

In addition, pregnant people with COVID-19 are at increased risk of having a pre-term birth and might be at increased risk of other adverse pregnancy outcomes, compared with pregnant people without Covid-19.

**Concern #4: The vaccine might adversely affect my growing foetus**

**THE TRUTH:** Your foetus will be affected – but in a good way! Early scientific evidence shows that babies can get some level of protection against Covid-19 when their mother is vaccinated. The mother builds antibodies and these are transmitted to the baby in the womb.

Antibodies made after a pregnant person received an mRNA Covid-19 vaccine were found in umbilical cord blood. This means Covid-19 vaccination during pregnancy might help to protect babies against Covid-19.

**Concern #5: Getting an mRNA vaccine (like Pfizer) can change DNA**

**THE TRUTH:** It is biologically impossible for messenger RNA (mRNA) to change your DNA, or change your baby's DNA. This is because it can't enter the cell's nucleus, which is where DNA is found. It simply cannot happen.

**Concern #6: I'm worried about the effect of the vaccine on my breastmilk**

**THE TRUTH:** None of the Covid-19 vaccines use a live virus, so getting vaccinated can't infect you or your breastfeeding baby with the Covid-19 virus.

Early studies into breastfeeding and mRNA vaccines show that Covid-19 vaccines are extremely unlikely to cross into breastmilk – and if they do, the only thing your baby is likely to ingest is some antibodies against Covid-19.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and SAHPRA don't recommend that you stop breastfeeding in order to get vaccinated against Covid-19. You get your vaccine and carry on with breastfeeding as normal.

**Concern #7: I'm worried that being pregnant might make my side-effects worse**

**THE TRUTH:** Anyone can have side-effects after being vaccinated against Covid-19, but the good news is that pregnant people haven't reported any different side-effects from non-pregnant people after vaccination

If you experience a fever after vaccination however – as some people do – be sure to control it with paracetamol, because in rare cases, fever can be harmful to your unborn baby. But this is usually only if the fever is high and goes on for a long time.

Some people – pregnant and not pregnant – have also had allergic reactions to the vaccines, but these can be safely treated in pregnancy. If you have a history of allergic reactions, be sure to tell the vaccinator when you go to get your jab.

*You can watch a one-hour vaccine talk on pregnancy and breastfeeding presented by a medical doctor [here](#) if you still have concerns.*