



Vaccines during pregnancy and why they matter:

A conversation guide for healthcare professionals





For many years, vaccines have helped bring diseases like polio, measles, and pertussis to an all-time low. Vaccines provide protection to vulnerable groups, especially pregnant people. However, in today’s digital world, there’s much misinformation about vaccines. This causes many, including pregnant people and those who recently gave birth, to be hesitant about vaccinating. Conversations between healthcare professionals and pregnant people about vaccines are crucial, as numerous studies show that when healthcare professionals, especially physicians, actively recommend vaccines and communicate their importance, patients are more likely to accept and follow through with vaccination. As a healthcare professional, this guide may assist how you talk with pregnant people about vaccines and their importance.

1. Present an overview of maternal vaccines and their importance

Explain that vaccines contribute to a healthy start for both birthing people and babies.

- Vaccines during pregnancy protect pregnant people from potentially serious illnesses, such as the flu and COVID-19. Complications from these illnesses during pregnancy can lead to hospitalization, preterm birth, and pregnancy loss.
- Vaccines that protect against these conditions also provide immunity to the baby, as antibodies formed in response to the vaccine transfer across the placenta, helping protect the newborn during the vulnerable early months. Also, many vaccines recommended during pregnancy are safe while breastfeeding, providing continued protection to the infant through antibodies passed in breast milk.

Start with a presumptive announcement that assumes the person is ready to vaccinate. Several observational studies indicate that “presumptive announcement language as contrasted with participatory conversational language makes for a stronger, more effective recommendation” (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Flu vaccine 	Maternal RSV vaccine 	COVID-19 vaccine 	Tdap vaccine 
Helps protect to pregnant and postpartum people from the seasonal flu. This protection also extends to their baby.	Recommended for and available to pregnant people between 32 weeks and 36 weeks. The vaccine protects the baby from Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), a respiratory virus that can be life-threatening. <i>*Offered during RSV season (this starts in the fall and peaks in winter).</i>	Protects against COVID-19 which can cause serious complications for both mom and baby. Research shows that COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding, offering crucial protection.	This vaccine is offered to pregnant people between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. It protects babies from pertussis (whooping cough), until they can receive their own vaccine.

2. Advise all pregnant women to be fully vaccinated and address vaccine hesitancy

Strongly advise that all pregnant women are fully vaccinated. Provide reassurance that vaccines recommended during pregnancy undergo rigorous testing for safety and efficacy. If asked, offer information on the research supporting the safety of vaccines. Use active listening, open communication, and science-based information to encourage confident, informed choices. Provide reliable resources to aide decision making, such as

marchofdimes.org/vaccines

Here are some common questions and concerns about vaccines with fact-based responses:

Is natural immunity better?

Fact:

Recovering from an illness can provide immunity, but it comes with a high risk of severe illness and complications. Vaccines offer a safer way to build immunity without the risks.

Can getting too many vaccines overwhelm the immune system?

Fact:

The immune system is exposed to countless germs daily. Think of vaccines as tiny shields. They train your body to recognize and fight harmful viruses, lowering the risk of getting seriously sick.

Will vaccination during pregnancy cause autism in babies?

Fact:

Many studies have debunked the link between vaccines and autism. Vaccines are safe and do not increase the risk of developmental disorders.

3. Conversation starters and advice for next steps

“As part of your prenatal care, I strongly recommend certain vaccines to ensure both you and your baby stay healthy. What concerns do you have about the safety of vaccines during pregnancy?”

“I’d like to talk with you about the importance of vaccinations during pregnancy. Getting vaccinated during pregnancy not only helps protect you but also provides important immunity for your baby. This protection is especially critical during the first few months when your baby is too young to receive some vaccines. It’s a crucial aspect of your prenatal care. I’m here to provide you with information and address questions you may have. I can also give you more information about where to get vaccinated.”

“I strongly recommend that you receive the flu vaccine during pregnancy. The flu can pose significant risks for pregnant women, and getting vaccinated is a safe and effective way to protect both you and your baby. The vaccine has been proven to be safe during pregnancy and can greatly reduce the chances of flu-related complications. We can administer the vaccine right here in the office today, and it’s an important step to ensure a healthy pregnancy. What questions or concerns do you have about the flu vaccine?”

4. Consider culture and personal beliefs

Understanding diverse perspectives is important. When sharing information about vaccines, keep in mind the diverse backgrounds cultures and languages within your community. Be open to questions and address concerns. By promoting routine vaccines, you can encourage pregnant people to make informed decisions and build a healthy community, one vaccination at a time.

Resources

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG):

- [acog.org/topics/immunization](https://www.acog.org/topics/immunization)
- US Health and Human Services: [hhs.gov/immunization](https://www.hhs.gov/immunization)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)
- Vaccine finder: [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)
- Find a health center: [findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov](https://www.findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control: [cdc.gov/vaccines](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

For more information and additional conversation, resources visit marchofdimes.org/vaccinestoolkit