

# COVID-19 vaccines and reproductive health

## Talking points for medical providers

Many people have concerns about how the COVID-19 vaccines might impact their reproductive health. Community members have told us they feel there isn't enough information about how the vaccines might impact reproductive health for themselves, their family members, and children. In addition, historical and recent harmful practices by medical and public health practitioners affect how much people trust these vaccines. **See suggested answers below to common questions about the COVID-19 vaccine and reproductive health.**

### “How can I trust the vaccine is safe for my reproductive health?”

#### How to address

For many Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, fears around medical practices and reproductive health are grounded in historical and continued harm. Forced sterilization and efforts to make Depo-Provera or other forms of short-term sterilization required for women on public assistance in the 1990s are a couple of examples of racist control over reproductive health, usually targeted at women of color<sup>1</sup>.

Acknowledge the history and current day reality of harm and justified fears. Be empathetic and transparent in your response.

#### Suggested responses

“I hear your concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine and your hesitation is normal. The harm caused to women of color is unacceptable and racist. Your feelings are valid. With the COVID-19 vaccines, the scientific community is being as transparent as possible--sharing everything we know, including when we have concerns. However, we do not have concerns about this vaccine affecting reproductive health. The vaccines are safe and effective. They provide protection against getting very sick with COVID-19. If you have specific questions about your reproductive health and the vaccines, I can answer those.”

### “Does the vaccine cause infertility or impotence?”

#### Suggested responses

“Your worries around reproductive health and vaccines are understandable. Here is what we know: there is no scientific evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility or impotence.”

“The COVID-19 vaccine teaches your body to make antibodies to fight the coronavirus. This process is focused on your immune system and is not known to interfere with your reproductive organs.”

### “Will the vaccine change my menstrual cycle?”

#### Suggested responses

“Changes in menstrual cycles can be caused by many different things, like stress. At this time there is no data that suggests vaccine interferes with menstrual cycles.”

“Some people have reported changes in their menstrual cycles after getting vaccinated, but there is no data currently available to suggest these are long term effects”.

## “Can I get the vaccine if I’m pregnant?”

### Suggested responses

“Yes, data show that COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy. Medical experts in pregnancy and birth recommend the COVID-19 vaccine for people who are pregnant, lactating, or planning to get pregnant<sup>2</sup>. There is no evidence that the vaccine causes any problems related to pregnancy, development of your baby, birth, or fertility. In fact, some studies show that a vaccinated parent can pass protective antibodies against COVID-19 along to their baby through pregnancy and lactation.”

“In the Pfizer vaccine trials, 23 volunteers became pregnant. One participant suffered a pregnancy loss, but this participant received a placebo, not the actual vaccine<sup>3</sup>. Getting COVID-19, on the other hand, can have a potentially serious impact on your pregnancy and health, and vaccines are the best protection.

Pregnant people who get COVID-19:

- Are at an increased risk for severe illness or death when compared to non-pregnant people. People who were recently pregnant also have an increased risk.
- Have an increased risk of severe complications like preterm birth or stillbirth.
- Are 2 to 3 times more likely to need advanced life support and a breathing tube.”

## “Do I need to stop breastfeeding if I get the COVID-19 vaccine?”

### Suggested responses

“You do not need to stop breastfeeding if you want to get vaccinated. In fact, early reports suggest the vaccine might help your body pass antibodies to your baby through breastmilk. More studies are needed, but if this is confirmed, it will help protect your baby from COVID-19.”

## “Didn’t one of the vaccines cause blood clots?”

### Suggested responses

“Yes, but the number of people who got blood clots after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was extremely low compared to the millions of people who got vaccinated and didn’t get blood clots. For comparison, the risk of getting blood clots from the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is much lower than it is when taking birth control, which millions of women use every day.

I recommend you get the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine instead of Johnson & Johnson due to the potential risk. Moderna and Pfizer are a different type of vaccine called messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines, and blood clots have not been reported.”

### Resources

<sup>1</sup> Volscho T, Racism and Disparities in Women’s Use of the Depo-Provera Injection in the Contemporary USA. *Critical Sociology*. 2011, available online at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254084585\\_Racism\\_and\\_Disparities\\_in\\_Women's\\_Use\\_of\\_the\\_Depo-Provera\\_Injection\\_in\\_the\\_Contemporary\\_USA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254084585_Racism_and_Disparities_in_Women's_Use_of_the_Depo-Provera_Injection_in_the_Contemporary_USA)

<sup>2</sup> American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, ACOG and SMFM Recommend COVID-19 Vaccination for Pregnant Individuals. July 30, 2021, available online at: <https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2021/07/acog-smfm-recommend-covid-19-vaccination-for-pregnant-individuals>

<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins Medicine, “COVID-19 Vaccines: Myth Versus Fact”. May 14, 2021, available online at: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-myth-versus-fact>

This guide is not intended to give medical advice and is for informational purposes only.