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**SUBJECT:** COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendation for Pregnant & Breastfeeding Individuals

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**Pages:** 4

**To:** Primary Care Providers, Obstetricians, and Midwives

**From:** Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

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- **Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is asking health care providers to strongly recommend COVID-19 vaccination to patients that are pregnant (regardless of trimester), breastfeeding or trying to conceive.**
- **Pregnant individuals who become infected with COVID-19 are at a significantly increased risk of morbidity including hospitalization, ICU admission and mechanical ventilation.**
- **mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are safe for pregnant and breastfeeding individuals.**
- **Pregnancy, breastfeeding and fertility concerns are not medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination.**

## Background

There is a large body of evidence demonstrating that pregnancy significantly increases the risk of morbidity for individuals who become infected with COVID-19. Although most patients who become infected with SARS-CoV-2 are asymptomatic or have mild-to-moderate symptoms, seven to 15 percent will experience moderate to severe disease, causing hospitalization. Canadian and international data indicate that pregnant individuals have a higher risk of admission to the ICU, mechanical ventilation, and need for ECMO.<sup>1</sup>

As of October 3, 2021, data from the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) on vaccine uptake shows that only 66 percent of those who are pregnant in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) were vaccinated with at least one dose. This is well below the overall average vaccination rate for WDG (87 percent of the eligible population with at least one dose).

## Public Health Recommendation

Given the strong evidence for the increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 during pregnancy, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health is asking health care providers to strongly recommend COVID-19 vaccination to patients that are pregnant (regardless of trimester), breastfeeding or trying to conceive.

### **Make a Strong Recommendation for Your Patients to be Vaccinated:**

- Do NOT recommend your patients wait to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Routinely assess the vaccination status of your patients.
- Validate patients who have already been vaccinated.
- Recommend COVID-19 vaccination for those who are unvaccinated or have received only one dose.
- Be prepared to answer questions about the COVID-19 vaccines.
- Administer vaccine to your patients or direct them on how they can get their vaccine.

### **Risk of Being Unvaccinated**

Individuals who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are at an increased risk of infection as Ontario continues to reopen, people move indoors, and there is more social interaction over the holiday season. Unvaccinated people, in general, have a seven-fold higher risk of symptomatic COVID-19 disease, a 25-fold higher risk of being in the hospital and a 60-fold higher risk of being in the ICU compared to the fully vaccinated.<sup>2</sup> Pregnancy increases the risk even further.

### **COVID-19 Vaccination is Strongly Recommended**

Both the [Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada](#) and the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#) (NACI) recommend that all pregnant and breastfeeding individuals be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with an mRNA vaccine as soon as possible provided no contraindications exist.<sup>3,4</sup> **Individuals can get vaccinated against COVID-19 in any stage of pregnancy or while breastfeeding.** Individuals planning to conceive should also receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

### **mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines are Safe**

**During Pregnancy:** Initially, there was limited data that could support recommendations about the COVID-19 vaccine for pregnant and breastfeeding individuals. We now have robust evidence that the mRNA vaccines are safe for these populations and we know there is a significantly increased risk of severe illness for pregnant individuals if they do get a COVID-19 infection. In a study of over 35,000 pregnant women who received an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, no safety signals were identified.<sup>5</sup> Preliminary data from Ontario also does not show any increased risk of concerns during pregnancy or complications at birth after receiving an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>6</sup>

**Breastfeeding:** Recent evidence demonstrates that mRNA vaccines do not transfer into breast milk, however, COVID-19 antibodies produced as a result of being vaccinated can transfer through breast milk and potentially provide protection to an infant who is consuming breast milk for the first months of life.<sup>7</sup>

**Fertility:** Following a review of the most recent research, Public Health Ontario reports that there is no evidence of an association between COVID-19 vaccination and female or male fertility.<sup>8</sup>

Pregnancy, breastfeeding and fertility concerns are not medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination. For more information on medical exemptions, please read the [Ministry of Health guidance](#), and the [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario FAQs for Physicians](#).

### **Ordering and Administering Vaccine**

If you need to order COVID-19 vaccine in single-dose syringes, complete WDGPH's [single-dose order form](#). If you have any questions about resetting your COVax password, please contact Madison Fach: [madison.fach@wdgpublichealth.ca](mailto:madison.fach@wdgpublichealth.ca).

If your office is not yet providing COVID-19 vaccines, [many pharmacies within WDG](#) offer Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. Currently, individuals may also drop-in to a WDGPH clinic without an appointment. Clinic dates, locations and times are available at [wdgpublichealth.ca/drop-ins](http://wdgpublichealth.ca/drop-ins). As more people become eligible for vaccination this year (i.e., children, third dose boosters), appointments will be required to manage the volume. Please check our website for the most up-to-date information.

WDGPH can support training and onboarding for any primary care or midwifery practice that has not yet offered COVID-19 vaccine.

### **Other Vaccines Recommended During Pregnancy**

[NACI recommends](#) that COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as, or any time before or after, other vaccines, including live, non-live, adjuvanted or unadjuvanted vaccines.

**Acellular pertussis vaccine** (one dose of Tdap) should be administered in every pregnancy, ideally between 27 and 32 weeks of gestation. Adults 18 years of age and older are eligible to receive a single publicly funded dose of the Tdap vaccine, irrespective of receiving a prior dose of Tdap in adolescence.

**Inactivated influenza vaccination** is also recommended for all pregnant women as they are amongst those at high risk of influenza-related complications or hospitalization.

### **Additional Resources and Information**

- WDGPH handout: COVID-19 Vaccine: [Preconception, Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Fact Sheet](#).
- [BORN: COVID-19 Numbers to know](#) (Ontario)
- WDGPH's COVID-19 Call Centre (Mon-Fri, 9-4) 1-800-265-7293, x7006

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