

# Pregnant, lactating women should get medical advice before getting vaccinated

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, who have fears that they are at high risk of Covid-19 infection are probably considering vaccination as a prevention measure.

However, they may be confused as many believe these women are not allowed to take the vaccine shots as its side effects could be harmful not only to the mothers, but also on the foetus and breastfed infants.

In actual fact, Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said, for now, this group has not been recommended to take the vaccine shots because of lack of sufficient data (on side effects).

"Regardless of the trimester, they (pregnant women) are not recommended to take it (vaccination) for the time being," he briefly told Bernama when contacted.

According to the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) in its updated frequently asked questions (FAQ) about the Covid-19 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine called Comirnaty, pregnant and lactating women were asked to consult their respective doctors as to whether they are suitable recipients for the vaccine.

"The clinical trial of the Comirnaty vaccine did not involve women who were pregnant or breastfeeding.

"As there is no data on the effectiveness and safety of the use of this vaccine for this sector of the population, recommendations cannot be made until the latest information is obtained," said NPRA.

Datuk Dr Ashar Abdullah, an obstetrician and gynecologist from KPJ Ampang Puteri Specialist Hospital, said, however, if they are frontline staff, then they should be vaccinated as they face a higher risk of Covid-19 infection.

"Currently the problem is that there is not enough data to support the routine vaccination of pregnant and lactating mothers but from what I know there is no additional risk for this group, just like everyone else," he said.

However, he said, the recommendation was only to delay the intake of vaccination jabs until sufficient data has been obtained, and it is not to say that it (vaccine) is not needed or should not be taken at all.

Also sharing Dr Ashar's view is Universiti Putra Malaysia medical microbiology lecturer Associate Professor Dr Niazlin Mohd Taib who said the need for pregnant frontline staff to receive the vaccine jabs is high

but depends on the trimester of the pregnancy.

However, just like other pregnant women, taking the vaccine shots for the pregnant frontline staff needs 'consensus', discussions and 'referrals' based on the data and facts.

"For pregnant mothers, the duration of pregnancy ... whether in the first, second or third trimesters... has to be taken into account to determine when is the right time for the vaccination to be administered.

"Discussions with the experts involved such as neonatologists, gynaecologists and those from maternity and children's hospitals on the need for vaccinations are necessary in terms of safety and risk factor of each person, because health and occupation factors play a part," she said.

Niazlin said if a pregnant woman is not at high risk of getting the Covid-19 infection, such as living in a green zone and the family members are not frontline workers, then the need for the vaccine is lower and they can wait until 'consensus' or 'guidelines' are issued.

She said the guidelines for immunisation changes according to the evidence of safety, effectiveness and importance of vaccination based on a person's risk of Covid-19 infection.

"Several health organisations around the world have also reviewed the importance of vaccination among them (pregnant/lactating women) as they are considered among those at risk of Covid-19 infection," she said.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar also opined that although the vaccine is not recommended for these women, he advised them to seek the views of experts first and not to make their own interpretations.

"Pregnant mothers generally cannot take (the jabs) but some experts are with the view that in the third trimester, the vaccine can be taken because the formation of the baby is complete...that's why we do not give any medicines (to pregnant women) during the first three months (of pregnancy).

"As such, we cannot equate all those who are pregnant. It is best to consult a doctor to be certain," he added.

Previously, International media reported that Pfizer had recently begun clinical trials of the vaccine in the United States involving 4,000 pregnant mothers to test the safety and effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccine. — Bernama