

COVID-19 Vaccine in Pregnancy: Vaccine Hesitancy Among Obstetricians and Midwives

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Dear Editor,

On the 16th of April 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advised all pregnant women should be offered the COVID-19 vaccine¹. Since this announcement, increasing evidence has highlighted that pregnant women are at increased risk of becoming severely unwell with COVID-19 and are more likely to have pregnancy related complications such as preterm birth and stillbirth². Despite this, we recognised hesitancy among obstetric staff relating to the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy.

Our study aimed to identify vaccine hesitancy among obstetricians and midwives in our unit. This initial identification was used as a platform to launch education sessions in an effort to better inform staff when providing guidance about the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy.

Though online data collection we distributed an eight question survey to the obstetric staff in our maternity unit. Subsequently, we implemented two weeks of educational sessions at biweekly MDT meetings, placed visual posters and information leaflets in the unit, alongside increased media coverage. Following this, we resurveyed the same group to investigate whether these interventions better informed staff and whether opinions had changed.

Forty-eight midwives (32/48) and doctors (16/48) responded to Survey one and 44 midwives (27/44) and doctors (17/44) responded to Survey two. All respondents had received the COVID-19 vaccine. Seventy-one percent (34/48) of respondents in Survey one stated in their role they would recommend the COVID-19 vaccine to pregnant women, with 27% (13/48) responding that they were unsure. In comparison, in Survey two, 91% (39/43) responded that they would recommend the vaccine in pregnancy, with only 9% (4/43) responding that they were unsure. The main reason for vaccine hesitancy among those who would not recommend the vaccine in Survey one was “concern about the long-term effects of vaccine” 86% (12/14) which reduced to 60% (3/5) in Survey two.

Considering the low uptake rates of the COVID-19 vaccine among pregnant women and increasing evidence of the additional risks of COVID-19 infection to this group, this project demonstrates the positive effect interventional education sessions have in better informing midwives and doctors. As often the first point of contact for pregnant women accessing information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy, we recognise that in educating staff we hope to enhance their interactions with patients. We recommend that maternity units across the country use our study model to educate staff with evidence based information with the hope that this will improve overall vaccine uptake among pregnant women.

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