

Unvaccinated mothers urge pregnant women to get jabbed

- Pregnant women are being urged to get the vaccine by unvaccinated mothers
- Powerful new video shows their experiences of severe COVID-19 during pregnancy
- 98% of pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19 are unvaccinated
- Vaccines continue to provide tens of thousands of pregnant women and their babies with vital protection from the virus

Unvaccinated women who suffered with COVID-19 during their pregnancies have told their harrowing stories of battling the virus, from being hospitalised to having emergency c-sections, as part of a new campaign encouraging expectant mothers to get the vaccine.

The video features three women who experienced serious complications after contracting COVID-19 before they'd been vaccinated, as well as the doctors and frontline staff who treated them, to warn of the dangers of the virus for pregnant women and their babies.

Medical expert Professor Asma Khalil from Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is also interviewed as part of the powerful new film and provides further reassurance on the importance of the vaccine.

Data published last week by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows the vaccines are safe for mothers and their babies, with good birth outcomes for vaccinated women who had their babies up to August this year. There were no consistent differences between vaccinated women and all women in the figures for stillbirths, low baby birthweights and premature births.

Nearly 1 in 5 COVID-19 patients who are most critically ill are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated. Of those pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19, 98% are unvaccinated, and no fully vaccinated pregnant women were admitted to intensive care with COVID-19 in England between February and the end of September 2021. Around 1 in 5 women who are hospitalised with the virus need to be delivered preterm to help them recover and 1 in 5 of their babies need care in the neonatal unit.

The women who feature in the new, short film have issued an urgent plea calling on expectant mothers to take up the vaccine as soon as possible to protect themselves and their babies.

Christina, a mental health therapist from Guildford who was hospitalised with COVID-19 in her third trimester and had to give birth via emergency c-section, said:

I went into hospital in my third trimester, and I thought I was

going to deliver a baby but the next thing I know, I was being told I had COVID-19. Symptoms started to arise and I quickly deteriorated. I was rushed in for a CT scan because the doctors feared I was having a pulmonary embolism.

I had to give birth via emergency c-section because there was concern that I could have a stillbirth. It was terrifying.

I don't know what the future holds for me and my baby; I'm still suffering with symptoms now along with the anxiety of not knowing how or when I'll recover. I would urge pregnant women to get vaccinated because I don't want anyone to experience what I went through.

Tanviha, who works in anaesthesiology and research in Manchester, spent two months in hospital with COVID-19 following an emergency c-section, said:

I caught COVID-19 during my second pregnancy in February earlier this year. At the time, the vaccine wasn't available to me and I quickly took a turn for the worse. I was rushed into hospital and went straight into intensive care where my condition deteriorated and my son was delivered by emergency c-section.

I was put to sleep and intubated, and my family were told it was unlikely I'd survive and to prepare for the worst. The day after I was intubated, the nurse told them they were going to switch the machine off, but instead I was transferred to an Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machine, which is a last resort for patients with severe heart and lung failure, and it saved my life.

The first time I saw my son he was two months old. It's the scariest experience of mine and my family's life but I'm just grateful that me and my son are alive. If you're unsure about getting vaccinated please come forward and get your jab, not everyone's as lucky as I am.

Joanne, a makeup advisor from Lincolnshire suffered complications with her pregnancy after catching COVID-19, she said:

I had been unsure what was the right thing to do about getting vaccinated while pregnant. I was planning on having the jab after my daughter was born but I caught COVID-19 when I was 35 weeks pregnant and became seriously ill, I couldn't get out of bed for a week.

I had nearly recovered but something just didn't feel right. I couldn't feel my baby kicking so I made an urgent appointment to see my midwife. The team at the hospital quickly spotted the baby's growth had dropped and her fluid was low.

Her heartbeat was going down and down so the consultant rushed me off for an emergency caesarean when Mollie-Ann was born. I'm so grateful to the maternity team for keeping me and my baby safe and I just wish I'd been vaccinated sooner.

The vaccines are safe for pregnant women and have no impact on fertility, which has been made extremely clear by the government, its senior clinicians and a range of independent experts from stakeholder groups such as RCOG, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and the British Fertility Society.

Since April 2021, around 84,000 pregnant women have received one dose and over 80,000 have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Out of all women between the ages of 16 and 49 on ECMO – a form of life support for the sickest of patients – in intensive care, pregnant women make up almost a third (32%) – up from just 6% at the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Professor Lucy Chappell, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department of Health and Social Care and Honorary Consultant Obstetrician, said:

The stories shared as part of this film are heartbreaking and provide invaluable, first-hand insight into why accepting the offer of a COVID-19 vaccine is so important for mothers and their babies.

Getting the vaccine is one of the most vital ways in which you can protect yourself and your baby from COVID-19, which can be really dangerous for pregnant women – of those pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19, 98% are unvaccinated.

Watch the film, speak to your clinician or midwife if you have any questions or concerns, and book in your vaccine without delay.

Professor Asma Khalil, spokesperson for Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said:

We are very concerned about the number of pregnant women who haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19.

We know that the COVID-19 can cause severe illness in pregnant women with a disproportionate number of unvaccinated pregnant women in intensive care. If a woman contracts COVID-19, evidence shows they are more likely to have a preterm birth or stillbirth.

Our message is clear, COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy is safe, it is not linked to an increased risk of miscarriage or stillbirth, and it's the best way of protecting you and your baby from the virus. We are recommending all pregnant women have their COVID-19 vaccines, including their third dose booster vaccine when they are

offered it.’’

The proportion of women who gave birth and were vaccinated during pregnancy has been steadily increasing since 16 April 2021, when the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised all pregnant women should be offered two vaccine doses at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

Pregnant women aged 40 and over who are health or social care workers, or are in an at-risk group, are now also eligible for booster vaccines three months after their second dose and will soon be able to book an appointment. Younger age groups will be invited by the NHS in order of age in due course.

The government is working closely with RCOG, RCM and other key stakeholders on engaging with women who are either pregnant or thinking about pregnancy and providing them with the latest advice and information at every possible opportunity. It’s also working with faith and community leaders to increase vaccine uptake, holding regular meetings to discuss the best ways to provide information to their communities.

The Chief Midwifery Officer for England, Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, has also written to fellow midwives and GP practices across the country stressing the need to encourage pregnant women to get the jab.

Liz, head of maternity at Epsom and St Helier Hospital Trust who features in the film, said:

We are treating more and more unvaccinated pregnant women with COVID-19. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women and is the best way to keep you and your baby, safe and out of hospital. Getting vaccinated works: across England, no pregnant woman that has had two vaccinations has been admitted to hospital due to COVID-19.

You can receive vaccination at any time in pregnancy, but the risks that unvaccinated pregnant women face of becoming severely unwell if they catch COVID-19 show exactly why we advise you to do so as soon as possible. This film is another stark reminder of the devastating impact COVID-19 can have on women and their babies.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Nearly 1 in 5 COVID-19 patients who are most critically ill are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated, which shows just how important it is that expectant mothers get the vaccine to keep themselves and their babies safe.

Over 81,000 pregnant women have so far received their first dose, with 65,000 being double-jabbed, which is fantastic, but there’s still more to be done.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for pregnant women and I urge everyone to get their vaccines as soon as they can to secure this significant protection”.

Gill Walton, chief executive of the Royal College of Midwives, said:

Having COVID-19 can double the chance of stillbirth and triples the chance of a preterm birth, which can have long-term health impact for the baby.

We know that the vaccine is a safe and effective way of preventing this, with hundreds of thousands of pregnant women worldwide having been vaccinated with no adverse effects.

Background:

You can watch the film here:

The UKHSA safety data can be found [here](#)