Getting vaccinated while pregnant – one woman's story of what persuaded her to get the jab

As we celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March, we recognize that pregnant women are one of the groups most vulnerable to developing serious illness and complications from COVID-19. Cara Jamieson, a breastfeeding specialist who works and volunteers in the north-east of Scotland, United Kingdom, discusses her decision to get vaccinated while pregnant.

"At the time vaccines started to be rolled out, my partner and I were trying for a baby – I wasn't sure what that would mean when I actually became pregnant."

Cara conceived her second child at the beginning of 2021 and fears about catching COVID-19 added to the normal worries that accompany pregnancy.

In the United Kingdom, information on vaccination for pregnant women was updated a number of times as evidence accumulated on their safety. However, changes in advice led Cara to feel confused and uncertain about whether she should get the vaccine or not.

"It really knocked my confidence and made me wonder and doubt whether it was the right thing to do to get vaccinated."

"What ultimately convinced me to get vaccinated was hearing about the numbers of pregnant women who had been vaccinated safely, and seeing in real time how serious COVID-19 was for pregnant women and the high number of unvaccinated pregnant women who were ending up in intensive care.

"I am incredibly grateful to those people who helped me to understand the evidence base and made me feel confident in my decision to get vaccinated whilst pregnant, despite my initial doubts. I recognize that

it offered me and my daughter protection against COVID-19 at a crucial time in both our lives."

Cara completed her vaccinations as she went into her third trimester, and had her booster dose just weeks after her baby was born, while she was breastfeeding.

"I had no side effects or symptoms after either of my vaccines or booster, apart from a bit of a sore arm that went after 24 hours. I was tired, but then I was pregnant and later breastfeeding a newborn, so that probably wasn't to do with the vaccine!" she laughs.

In her work as a breastfeeding specialist, Cara runs support groups where she speaks to many expectant mothers who are debating, as she did, whether to get vaccinated.

"My message to pregnant mothers is to find trusted sources of information and discuss any thoughts or concerns you might have with your midwife and/or doctor, rather than keeping them to yourself.

"Pregnant women need access to reliable, evidenced-based information so that any decision they make is an informed one, whether that's about vaccines or labour or infant feeding. Women need to feel confident in the decisions they are making. They need to understand the potential risks of not getting vaccinated, and they need to understand what their decision could mean for them and their baby going forward."

WHO has published a series of questions and answers to address some of the common queries that health providers and the public have about COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy, and to help expectant mothers make their own informed decisions.

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