

## - Virus

**Facts: COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy**

Gynecologists in Germany want pregnant women to be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccinations. But there is confusion about the facts. Here is what you need to know.

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Studies done during the coronavirus pandemic have indicated that pregnant women are a high-risk group for COVID-19 infection.



In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel and Belgium, expectant mothers have even been moved up vaccination priority lists.

In Germany, meanwhile, experts say the advice is less clear. A group of gynecological associations and practitioners have published a public statement calling on Germany's independent Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) to take a clearer stand — and advise that all pregnant women should be vaccinated.

So far, the standing committee has said that vaccination against COVID-19 in pregnancy can only be recommended in some individual cases. But STIKO has said it does not want to recommend COVID vaccination for pregnant women in general, pointing out that there is just not enough data to support such a move as being safe.

But in the state of Saxony, health authorities have decided not to wait for STIKO to recommend vaccination during pregnancy. The state has its own Vaccination Commission, SIKO, which has independently decided to recommend COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant women, said Cornelia Hösemann, a gynecologist and SIKO member.

In the rest of the country, the task of weighing up the risks and benefits of vaccination is left to gynecologists and pregnant women themselves, making it all the more important that parents-to-be know a few facts.

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COVID-19 infection during pregnancy?

"In principle, pregnant women are more susceptible to all infectious diseases," said Hösemann, who also chairs Saxony's state-level Professional Association of Gynecologists (Landesverbandes des Berufsverbandes der Frauenärzte).

"During pregnancy, a mother's immune system virtually shuts down to stop [the body] rejecting the baby," said Hösemann. Half of the baby's genetic material comes from the father and is essentially foreign to the mother's body, and that may otherwise cause it to be rejected.

In their public statement, 11 professional associations in Germany called for the preferential vaccination of pregnant women because, they say, there is sufficient data to show that a COVID-19 infection is dangerous for both mother and child.

"Many pregnant women are rightly worried that they could become infected and get seriously ill," Christian Albring, a practicing gynecologist and president of the federal Professional Association of

Gynecologists (BVF), told DW.

"Gynecologists at university hospitals have reported that there are more seriously ill pregnant women in intensive care units, in this current wave of infections, than last year," said Albring, who was involved in drafting the public statement.

The statement said that pregnant women need intensive care six times more often than nonpregnant women who get infected.

A study published in the American scientific journal, JAMA Pediatrics, in April found that the disease took a more severe course in pregnant women compared to non-pregnant women. The researchers also found a higher mortality rate for mother-to-be and their babies.

However, German virologist Christian Drosten, who has a regular podcast on public broadcaster NDR, points out that the study includes countries where poor health care systems makes pregnancy riskier in general, even without a COVID-19 infection.

Why are pregnant women vaccinated in some countries, but not in Germany?

"Since vaccination has been available in Germany, pregnant women have been coming to my practice and asking: Why not us as well?" said Hösemann.

Germany's standing committee on vaccination has said