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Better protection for babies born to vaccinated mothers

The Straits Times · 17 Feb 2022 · A16

• Babies born to mothers fully vaccinated against the coronavirus during pregnancy were around 60 per cent less likely to be hospitalised with severe Covid-19, a new study by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Tuesday.

Such an effect had been hypothesised – because of the transfer of antibodies through the placenta during pregnancy and through breast milk after birth – but was not backed by real-world evidence until now.

The CDC carried out a study involving 379 babies aged up to six months who were hospitalised at 20 paediatric centres from July last year to this January.

The authors studied the odds of Covid-19 vaccination among mothers whose babies were hospitalised with the disease (176 infants) compared to the odds of vaccination among mothers whose babies were hospitalised for non-Covid-19 reasons (203 infants), who were a control group.

This is a statistical method used in real-world studies to try to examine patients with similar characteristics, and is often used when it is not possible or ethical to carry out a randomised clinical trial.

“Babies less than six months old whose mothers were vaccinated were 61 per cent less likely to be hospitalised with Covid-19,” said CDC researcher Dana Meaney-Delman.

Meanwhile, 84 per cent of babies who were hospitalised with Covid-19 were born to people not vaccinated in pregnancy. The one baby who died in the study was born to a mother who was not vaccinated.

Black and Hispanic babies were disproportionately hospitalised for Covid-19.

“The bottom line is that maternal vaccination is a really important way to help protect these young infants,” said Dr Meaney-Delman.

The study further found that completion of a two-dose vaccine programme later in pregnancy was more protective than earlier in pregnancy – 80 per cent compared to 32 per cent.

Although that is consistent with what is known about the waning of antibody levels in the months that follow vaccination, Dr Meaney-Delman said it was important for people to get vaccinated at any stage during pregnancy in order to protect both the mother and baby.

“If we have a woman who comes in in the first trimester and is vaccinated she can actually be eligible for a booster vaccine later in pregnancy,” she said, but added it was premature for the agency to recommend boosters specifically for the pregnant.

A limitation of the study was that it began during the early phase of vaccine roll-out and did not include mothers who were vaccinated prior to pregnancy.