

COVID-19 VACCINES AND BREASTFEEDING

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In the context of COVID-19, optimal breastfeeding practices are critical

But the pandemic has impacted breastfeeding

- **Overburdened** health systems
- **Exploitation** of pandemic by **BMS manufacturers**
 - **47 countries reporting code violations** (UNICEF internal reporting)
- **Misconceptions** about breastfeeding
- **Severe reductions** in the prevalence of BF due to COVID-19 disruptions;
 - **138,398 child deaths** across **129 LMICs** over a 1-year period plus additional morbidity



1. <https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/112/2/251/5860091>,
2. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition/child-nutrition-and-covid-19/>,
3. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2214-109X%2820%2930327-2>

We welcome the arrival of vaccines

- Unprecedented **investment** in **research** and development and global cooperation, scientists have been able to **develop a vaccine** against COVID-19 **in record time**, while still maintaining **robust, evidence-based and rigorous regulatory standards**
- On 31 December 2020, WHO listed the **Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 mRNA vaccine (BNT162b2)** **for emergency use**, making it the first to receive emergency validation from WHO since the outbreak began a year earlier



Recommendations for use of the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine during breastfeeding

- [WHO- Interim recommendations for use of the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, BNT162b2, under Emergency Use Listing \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/clinical-management/interim-guidance-for-use-of-the-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine)
- Lactating woman who are part of a group recommended for vaccination, e.g. health workers, should be offered vaccination.
 - **WHO does not recommend discontinuing breastfeeding after vaccination**
- **UK Public Health Guidance** -Vaccine can be received whilst breastfeeding
- [FDA and CDC Guidance-Breastfeeding Women May Opt to Receive the Vaccine - \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/27/health/covid-19-vaccine-breastfeeding.html)
 - Leaves open the possibility that pregnant and breastfeeding women may opt for immunization against the coronavirus



Recommendations for use of the Moderna and Astra Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine during breastfeeding

Moderna <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/the-moderna-covid-19-mrna-1273-vaccine-what-you-need-to-know>

- **WHO:** The vaccine can be offered to a breastfeeding woman who is part of a group recommended for vaccination (e.g. health workers); discontinuing breastfeeding after vaccination is currently not recommended.

Astra Zeneca

- <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/news/updated-advice-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-pregnancy-and-women-who-are-breastfeeding/>

What we know - mRNA Covid-19 vaccines and breastfeeding

- **No data on the safety** of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating women or on the effects of mRNA vaccines on breastfed children
- **Vaccine efficacy** is expected to be similar in lactating women as in other adults
- **Vaccine** not a **live virus vaccine** and the **mRNA** does not enter the nucleus of the cell and is degraded quickly
- It is **biologically** and **clinically unlikely** to pose a risk to the breastfeeding infant



Preparing for vaccine rollout

Disseminate WHO guidance

Request countries to monitor
and report

Contribute to development of
FAQs

UNICEF and partners leading
vaccine procurement and supply
operation

[COVAX information centre](#) |
[UNICEF](#)

COVID-19 vaccines rollout and breastfeeding - experiences from 11 countries in ECAR

- UNICEF collected data to understand:
 - what guidance is being provided at country level on the vaccine roll out and breastfeeding
 - any impact on breastfeeding practices
- A short set of questions were sent to 3 regions
- Data received from **11 countries** in **ECAR**
 - **Turkey, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, North Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Georgia, Montenegro, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria**

COVID-19 vaccines rollout and breastfeeding – summary of findings

- Few countries (**5/11**) **commenced** vaccine rollout
- The primary target groups receiving vaccination: Seniors- 65+ years, **Health workers**
 - Leaves open the option for breastfeeding women to receive the vaccine- **4/5** countries
- COVID-19 vaccine **recommendations** for breastfeeding seem to align with CDC, WHO/SAGE recommendations- **4/5 countries**
- One country-COVID-19 vaccination is **not recommended** during **breastfeeding**
- UNICEF working with the relevant partners to ensure that recommendations on breastfeeding are included in the relevant national guidance especially in countries **preparing to rollout**
- Seemingly, a few countries administer **Sinovac (Chinese)**, yet to be included under WHO recommendations
- **Too early to report on any effect on breastfeeding**
- **Regular updates** in the coming months and **monitor what** is happening

We call on vaccine developers, researchers, funders, and policy makers

- **generate evidence** on the safety of vaccination for breastfeeding
- **analyze the risk/benefit** tradeoff of vaccination and breastfeeding
- **urge** governments to adopt WHO/SAGE recommendations into national guidelines



The importance of advocacy for breastfeeding

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/01/05/why-were-breastfeeding-women-denied-the-covid-19-vaccine/>: *mums in pushing the guidance to change such as in the UK*

[the ABM statement](#)



Call for presentations on research related COVID-19 vaccine and infant feeding

- **Next RIG Session- March 5, 2021**
- **Session will focus on COVID-19 vaccines and Breastfeeding**
- Link to sign up for RIG sessions here:
<https://www.advancingnutrition.org/what-we-do/monitoring-evaluation-and-learning/CIF-RIG-and-WG>



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