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,
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)
- 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)
  - 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


- **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**

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