

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 17



COVID-19 Vaccinations and Women Veterans

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Presentation to VISN 17 Women Veterans Collaborative

February 23, 2021



COVID-19 Infection Risk in Pregnancy

- Pregnant patients with COVID-19 are at increased risk of severe illness when compared to nonpregnant peers
- Increased rates of hospitalization
- Increased risk for ICU admission
 - 10.5 versus 3.9 per 1,000 cases
 - aRR = 3.0; 95% CI = 2.6–3.4
- Increased rates of invasive therapies
- Increased rates of invasive ventilation
- **Increased rates of death**
 - 1.5 versus 1.2 per 1,000 cases
 - aRR = 1.7; 95% CI = 1.2–2.4

Those with comorbidities (e.g., obesity, DM) may be at even higher risk

COVID-19 Infection Risk in Pregnancy: Highlight Existing Disparities

- Non-Hispanic Black or African American women made up 14.1% of women
 - However, represented 176 (36.6%) deaths overall, including nine of 34 (26.5%) deaths among pregnant women and 167 of 447 (37.4%) deaths among nonpregnant women
 - Increased risk for ICU admission
 - Risk for receiving invasive ventilation among pregnant women vs. nonpregnant women
 - Aged 15–24 years: 3.0 times (95% CI = 1.6–5.7)
 - Aged 35–44 years: 3.6 times (95% CI = 2.4–5.4)
 - Death during pregnancy 2.4x risk among Hispanic women (95% CI = 1.3-4.3)

mRNA vaccines

- Do not contain a live virus but rather induce humoral and cellular immune response through use of viral mRNA
- Not live virus vaccines, nor do they use an adjuvant to enhance vaccine efficacy
- Do not enter nucleus and do not alter human DNA in recipients
- The theoretical risk of fetal harm from mRNA vaccines is very low
- Expected safety profile similar to that observed in non-pregnant individuals
- Pfizer-BioNTech 95.0% (95% CI, 90.3%–97.6%)
- Moderna 94.1% (95% CI, 89.3%–96.8%)

COVID-19 Vaccinations and Women Veterans

- Routine testing for pregnancy before COVID-19 vaccination is not recommended. Women who are trying to become pregnant do not need to avoid pregnancy after receiving an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

What do professional societies recommend?

{American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) and Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine (SMFM) }

- STRONGLY RECOMMEND that pregnant women have access to COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna)
- Recommend shared decision-making regarding receipt of vaccine
- Risks to pregnant women from SARS-CoV-2 infection
- Vaccine safety
- While a conversation with a clinician may be helpful, it should not be required prior to vaccination (unnecessary barrier to access)

Vaccine considerations for counseling

- Pregnant women who experience fever following vaccination should be counseled to take acetaminophen
- There is currently no preference for use of one COVID-19 vaccine over another
- Exception: those age 16-17yo who are only eligible for Pfizer-BioNtech
- Individuals should complete their 2-dose series with the same vaccine
- COVID-19 vaccines should not be administered within 14 days of receipt of another vaccine
- Anti-D immunoglobulin (i.e. Rhogam) will not interfere with the immune response to the vaccine, and should not be withheld

COVID-19 vaccination: Other populations of interest

Lactating individuals

- Similar guidance as in pregnancy – though not included in most clinical trials, vaccines should not be withheld from those who otherwise meet criteria it
- Theoretical concerns regarding safety of vaccinating lactating individuals do not outweigh potential benefits
- No need to avoid initiation or discontinue breastfeeding surrounding administration

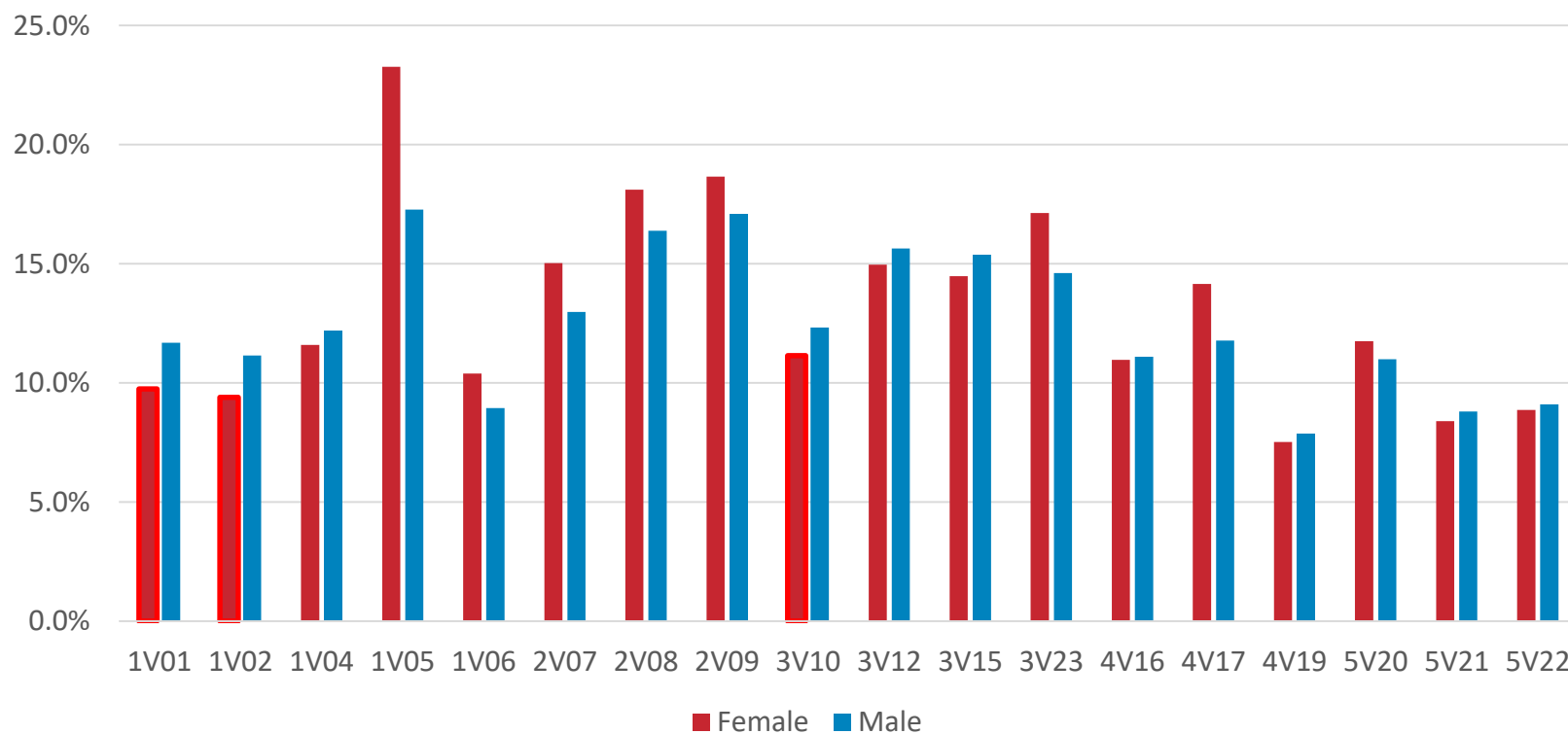
Individuals contemplating pregnancy

- Vaccination is strongly encouraged
- It is not necessary to delay pregnancy after completing both doses of vaccine
- If an individual becomes pregnant after the 1st dose, the 2nd should be administered as indicated
- Given the mechanism of action and the safety profile in non-pregnant individuals, COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are not thought to cause an increased risk of infertility

COVID-19 Vaccinations and Women Veterans

- VA continues to follow [Vaccination Considerations for People who are Pregnant or Breastfeeding | CDC](#)
- CDC and the independent Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP):
 - Recommends that certain groups (e.g., healthcare personnel, followed by other frontline essential workers) are offered vaccination during the first months of the COVID-19 vaccination program.
 - People who are pregnant and part of a group recommended to receive the COVID-19 vaccine may choose to be vaccinated. *If they have questions about getting vaccinated, a discussion with their healthcare provider might help them make an informed decision.*

Veterans Vaccinated per FY20 VHA User by Sex, Age 65-74 (2/5/21 preliminary)



Questions?