First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Vaccinated Mothers Can Transfer Antibodies to Their Babies to Protect Them From COVID-19

A message from Dr. Unjali Malhotra, Medical Director – Women's Health

We are warriors—we can feed our babies with our own bodies, we can nourish our babies with our bodies, and we can protect our children with our bodies.

Throughout the pandemic, mothers have been seeking medical advice on the best methods to protect their unborn and newborn children from COVID-19. However, what we now know is that the best protection can come from ourselves.

In a study published in January, pregnant women in their third trimester who became sick with COVID-19 were able to transfer antibodies to the fetus across the placenta.

Antibodies are immune system proteins that target viruses, bacteria, and other organisms that enter the human body and have the potential to make us sick. When you are pregnant, your antibodies cross the placenta and enter the fetal circulation; this protects the fetus, both in the womb and after birth.

Antibodies created by the vaccine work the same way, so that mothers do not have to become sick first in order to get that anti-viral protection for their children. The COVID-19 vaccine creates antibodies which can then be transferred across the placenta.

There's more good news. Breastfeeding mothers can pass along the antibodies in their breast milk, which means that even if the antibodies were not passed along via the placental layer, newborns can still receive some immune protection from the mother.

THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS WE'VE LEARNED DURING COVID-19, AS WELL AS THINGS WE STILL NEED TO LEARN.

- We've learned that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and recommended during pregnancy
- We have learned that, like other vaccines for vaccine-preventable diseases, we may be able to protect our babies by vaccinating ourselves
- We have learned that COVID-19 antibodies transfer from mom to baby via the placenta and in breast milk
- We still need to learn how to optimize this transport of antibodies via the placenta (when to offer the vaccine in order to get the most antibodies and if there can be increased transport with adjustments to the vaccine)
- But most of all, we know that we are lifegivers and we want to protect the next generation with all our hearts.

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccines and how you can get vaccinated, visit our FAQ.