

A SHOT OF HOPE Ask The Experts

Can pregnant women and cardiac patients get the Covid vaccine?

Facts, not WhatsApp forwards, are needed to tame the coronavirus. Our panel of top medical experts answers all your Covid-related questions

How is the second wave affecting children? How do we take care of children showing symptoms of Covid-19? When is a vaccine for children expected?

— HITARTH TULSIAN, NEW DELHI

Till last year, we were seeing only 9-10% of overall Covid-19 cases in children. But this year, we have seen a huge burst of paediatric cases. In fact, even newborns are getting infected. The symptoms being presented in children last year were cold, cough, breathlessness and fever, but this time we are seeing diarrhoea, skin rashes and conjunctivitis, among other symptoms.

The RT-PCR test, at best, is 67% to 83% sensitive, so we have to take a combined picture of clinical symptoms, lab values, and the RT-PCR.

When you see such symptoms in a child, the first thing you need to do is isolate the child, get an RTPCR test done on the second or third day, and make sure the child gets adequate initial treatment for fever with paracetamol. Consult your local physician and do not start on any antibiotics and other combination drugs at home.

With regard to the vaccine, it is the most important health intervention known to mankind against Covid-19 and the only way we can arrest the pandemic. So far, vaccinations for the paediatric age group have not been licensed in India but clinical trials have been completed and mRNA vaccines are now being approved for children aged 12 to 15 in the US and Canada. Soon, it will be expanded to all children older than 6 months.

How safe is the vaccine for cardiac patients since there have been instances of blood coagulation after vaccination? Also, should a patient with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) take the vaccine?

— **SAKSHI JHALANI, JAIPUR**

There have been a few reports of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis in patients post vaccination, but these are rare cases. Hence, it is thoroughly recommended that all patients go in for the vaccine, especially those in the high-risk groups. In fact, data from the United Kingdom, United States and Israel has shown that vaccines have a considerable role in curtailing the disease with most people vaccinated in these countries.

And yes, vaccines are also recommended to people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In fact, people with COPD — much like people with high BP, diabetes or heart disease — are at higher risk of dying from Covid. Hence, they are likely to benefit even more from the vaccine.

I have been prescribed anti-anxiety medicines by my therapist. Is it safe to take the pills the day I am vaccinated or after?

— **AMIT, PUNE**

It is mostly safe to be administered the Covid vaccine even when on anxiety drugs as prescribed by a psychiatrist. Still, it would be useful to discuss it with the treating psychiatrist before getting a vaccination. It is noteworthy that in case of high-grade fever, disorientation or drowsiness after the vaccine, the patient should consult a general physician as well as their psychiatrist.

I exercise every day to de-stress. Can I do heavy exercises or go to the gym after my vaccination?

— **AMIT CHAUHAN, NEW DELHI**

While a lot of people are doing exercises to keep their minds and bodies fit during the pandemic, it is advisable not to do heavy load exercises just before the vaccine or soon after it.

Is it safe for the baby if a breastfeeding mother gets vaccinated? Also, is it safe for pregnant women to get vaccinated?

— **SUBHASHMITA PANIGRAHI, BERTHAMPUR**

Pfizer and Moderna have shared safety data on the vaccines that have been clinically tested on 94,000 women — frontline workers, pregnant women and women with comorbidities. However, Covishield and Covaxin have not done

so. The Office of the Director Of Public Health and Preventive Medicine issued a circular on May 6, 2021, stating the “vaccines at present in use are contraindicated in pregnant and lactating mothers.” Moreover, the Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech also do not recommend such vaccination, the circular states.



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