

A SHOT OF HOPE ASK THE EXPERT

Are vaccines safe in pregnancy, can transplant patients take remdesivir?

Please suggest a vaccination schedule for someone planning to have a baby — when to take first and second doses.

—SHASHANK AGRAHARI, JABALPUR

Vaccinations have been recommended for couples trying to conceive. There is no recommended interval for getting pregnant after the second dose. The currently available vaccines, although they have different formulations and additives, are not live vaccines and hence are safe to administer to pregnant and lactating women as well. The government has recently approved vaccination for lactating women, however we are yet to receive a formal statement about vaccinating pregnant women. The most intelligent approach for couples planning to conceive would be to opt for pre-pregnancy counselling. This entails advice for men and women regarding sexual health, folic acid consumption and safely planning pregnancy, besides vaccination. Taking both vaccine doses (Covishield or Covaxin) before conceiving will give a couple adequate time (at least 2-3 months) to consume medications for immunity as well as for healthy conception, and allow them to enjoy the full benefit of both immunity and efficacy of the vaccines. Regardless of any known fertility issues (unlike oncological indications) that require couples to plan fertility treatments immediately, planning can be easily deferred for 6 months without a change in the prognosis for future conceptions.

Is it safe to conceive between two vaccine doses?

—HARBANS GUPTA, PANCHKULA

If a couple has conceived after taking only the first dose, there are two options – take the second dose after the first trimester of pregnancy, if the government passes an order to vaccinate pregnant women, or go with the benefits of a single dose. Couples need to know that irrespective of vaccination, pregnant women, especially, must take all safety measures and follow Covid protocols stringently throughout pregnancy. A collaborative group composed of all the top gynecological societies/committees has made a plea to the government to pass an order to enable pregnant women to safeguard themselves and avail the benefits of vaccination.

My mother, who is 81, suffers from arthritis and thrombocytopenia (cause unknown). She has been on a low-dose of steroids for several years. Her platelet count hovers around 65,000. Can she take a Covid-19 vaccine? If so, is Covishield or Covaxin preferable?

—CHANDNI SAHGAL,

MUMBAI

A low platelet count can increase the risk of bleeding. A finer needle (26 gauge), along with sustained pressure for five minutes, should suffice. Either vaccine is fine, but I would wait if the steroid dose is more than 10mg prednisolone per day.

I'm going to study in the US this fall. Can a person take two different vaccines if Indian vaccination isn't accepted in the US, or if I am unable to get a second dose of Covishield?

—SHREYAS RAMESH, BENGALURU

There is data suggesting that the Oxford vaccine (Covishield) followed by the Pfizer vaccine results in more short-term side-effects (fever), but is safe overall.

Do Covid patients have permanent scarring in the lungs?

—GOKUL MURUGAPANDIAN,

CHENNAI

The healing process varies from person to person. Most people do seem to recover with a lower lung function than baseline, and a few scars in the lungs if they have had moderate-to-severe Covid. In the majority, this isn't disabling.

Can remdesivir be given to an 80-year-old who received a kidney transplant 11 years ago? Their creatinine is 3.7mg/dl.

—PRADIPTA SANKER GUHA,

GUWAHATI

Many drugs used to treat Covid-19 are repurposed – they were originally meant for other diseases. Remdesivir is an antiviral that was used to treat other viral diseases like Ebola. Now, it is used to prevent viral multiplication and severity in select patients with Covid-19. Several agencies have said it is not a lifesaving drug, but it certainly plays an effective role in some patients, including those with comorbidities. Doctors do not prescribe the drug to patients with advanced kidney disease. In any case, it is a drug that should be taken only under medical supervision. So, it is best to leave the decision to the treating doctor.

People tell me to increase my intake of protein before and after vaccination. Will it make any difference?

—ABRAHAM SMYTHE, PUNE

It is always good to take a fibre-rich, highprotein, low-salt, low-fat diet. Taking extra protein just before and after vaccinations may not matter much. An everyday balanced diet can help you build a good immune system to prevent and fight the disease. However, if you have health issues, do consult your doctor and dietitian for a healthy diet chart.



**Dr Priya
Selvaraj**

ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR, GG
HOSPITAL
FERTILITY
RESEARCH &
WOMEN'S
SPECIALTY
CENTRE,
CHENNAI



**Dr Lancelot
Pinto,**

PULMONOLOGIST/
RESPIROLOGIST
AT HINDUJA
HOSPITAL,
MAHIM,
MUMBAI



**Dr Rajan
Ravichandran,**

NEPHROLOGIST,
MIOT
HOSPITALS,
CHENNAI



TOI, in
association with
Unicef, has put
together a panel
of experts to
answer
questions about
Covid-19 and
vaccination.
Scan the QR
code or visit
bit.ly/3gKqS6h
to ask your
question