

JURY STILL OUT ON PREGNANT WOMEN GETTING A COVID JAB

[Chris Bateman](#)



Globally, pregnant, voluntarily immunised women were carefully tracked for any side-effects in ongoing research. (Photo By BSIP/UIG Via Getty Images)

Atop women's health scientist clinician has warned pregnant women that the risk-benefit of Covid-19 immunisation for them is "still under evaluation".

This leaves [pregnant women](#), especially healthcare workers, between a rock and a hard place because the onus is on them to choose whether to be immunised.

Helen Rees, executive director of Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute and chairperson of the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority, said most frontline healthcare workers were women and many of childbearing age. She pointed to the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) warning against the use of currently available Covid-19 vaccines during pregnancy — except for people at high risk of exposure or suffering severely from Covid-19.

Shabir Madhi, the lead investigator on the AstraZeneca vaccine trial in South Africa, confirmed that relatively few trials abroad had included pregnant women as subjects. Those that had, had failed to produce any definitive data.

Madhi added that the WHO recommended currently available Covid-19 vaccines only for high-risk groups, including pregnant healthcare workers.

The AstraZeneca healthcare workers million-vial rollout, due to begin at the end of this week, is now on hold. This follows local trial findings that the vaccine does not significantly reduce the risk of mild or moderate Covid-19 from the new, more infectious 501Y.V2 variant, which drove the second surge in South Africa to a peak at the end of January.

Rees said the AstraZeneca vaccine was safe and could not cause any disease, but studies on pregnant and lactating women remained ongoing.

“It’s an incredibly important question; it was the same with ARVs. [Not all antiretrovirals are safe for pregnant women.] We recognise there may be a risk to those pregnant, or those who don’t even know they’re pregnant. As we get more data, the risk-benefit of immunising pregnant women will be continuously evaluated,” she said.

Globally, pregnant, voluntarily immunised women were carefully tracked for any side- effects in ongoing research.

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