

## **Fertility treatment and vaccination – FAQ**

### **Why has this announcement been made and why now?**

We fully appreciate this is disappointing.

Our priority is to maintain patients safety and for treatment to result in a healthy mum and a healthy baby.

A combination of evidence of risk of COVID-19 for pregnant women, increasing virus incidence and uncertainties about Omicron meant that lead Clinicians in the NHS Assisted Conception Units in Scotland and Scottish Government consensus was that it was sensible to defer treatment for unvaccinated women.

### **What does ‘fully vaccinated’ mean?**

If you have had your first and second COVID-19 vaccinations and your booster or if you have had your second vaccination and are within 12 weeks of having your booster then you are considered to be fully vaccinated and should continue your treatment as normal, in line with advice. If more than 12 weeks have elapsed between your second dose and your booster, you should seek to have your booster as soon as possible to continue your treatment. As soon as you have had your booster treatment can continue.

### **What if it is more than 3 months since my second jab but I had to delay the booster due to having COVID in the last 4 weeks?**

In this case your treatment will be deferred until you have had your booster but treatment can recommence as soon as you have had it. You will have to wait 4 weeks after the date you were tested to get any dose of the vaccine

### **What if I can't have the vaccine for clinical reasons?**

There are very few individuals who cannot receive the vaccine.

If you are in this category your treatment should be risk assessed on a case by case basis by treating clinicians but it may be temporarily deferred.

[COVID Status: Guidance common questions | NHS inform](#)

### **How are you helping women who are not vaccinated?**

If your treatment is temporarily deferred you will have the deferral time added back on to your treatment journey to ensure that no patient loses out on treatment.

Centres can, in some cases, seek to expedite vaccination for you if you choose (for example by reducing the time between the first and second dose and the booster) and as soon as you are vaccinated you can start your treatment.

The Centres will also provide you with advice about vaccination to support your choice.

### **How long will my treatment be deferred/postponed?**

This recommendation will be kept under review. It will be reviewed alongside emerging evidence of risk as well as the prevailing levels of COVID-19 during January and February 2022 to ascertain whether treatment of unvaccinated women should recommence, or whether a further deferral is necessary.

If you have had your treatment deferred, you will be contacted as soon as the policy changes.

The four Assisted Conception clinics across Scotland and Scottish Government continue to work closely on this issue, in discussion with the patient support group Fertility Network UK.

### **It is our personal choice to get vaccinated**

You can continue to choose whether to get vaccinated. The decision to temporarily defer fertility treatment for unvaccinated women was taken on the grounds of safety in light of evidence of increased risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy, the uncertainties about the impact of the Omicron variant and the high level of virus incidence at the present time.

The JCVI has put pregnant women in high-risk category. The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, the Royal College of Midwives, the British Fertility Society and Scottish Government all are strongly advising vaccination, including boosters for pregnant women.

The British Fertility Society also strongly recommends vaccination prior to treatment.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) who regulate fertility treatment within the UK also recommends that anyone having fertility treatment has a vaccination because of the increased risks to mother and baby of COVID-19 in pregnancy.

### **Is it safe to take the COVID-19 vaccine if I am currently having or planning to have fertility treatment?**

Yes.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and NHS Scotland strongly recommends people get the vaccine when offered. There is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccines will affect fertility in women or men. More information is available on this at [NHS Inform Pregnancy, breastfeeding and the coronavirus vaccine | The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine \(nhsinform.scot\)](#).

The British Fertility Society and the Association of Reproductive and Clinical Scientists has said that there is absolutely no evidence, and no theoretical reason, that any of the vaccines can affect the fertility of women or men.

The decision to temporarily defer fertility treatment for unvaccinated women was taken on the grounds of safety in light of evidence of increased risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy, the uncertainties about the impact of the Omicron variant and the high level of virus incidence at the present time.

### **Where can I get more information on the reasons why vaccination is so important during pregnancy?**

Public Health Scotland and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have both produced information on the importance of vaccination in pregnancy, that can be accessed here:

[Pregnancy, breastfeeding and the coronavirus vaccine | The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)

[Combined info sheet and decision aid 16.12.2021 \(rcog.org.uk\)](#)

### **Who agreed this temporary recommendation?**

The Scottish Government recommended a temporary deferral of fertility treatment for patients who are not fully vaccinated against COVID. This decision was made in light of:

- representations made by the lead Clinicians in the NHS Assisted Conception Units in Scotland,
- evidence of increased levels of morbidity and risk of severe illness from COVID-19 amongst unvaccinated pregnant women,
- increased incidence of pregnancy complications in women with COVID,
- ongoing uncertainty around the high transmissibility and unknown impact of the Omicron variant on pregnant women,
- and the high and increasing incidence of the virus in Scotland.

### **Is it for all fertility treatment or only IVF?**

The advice is that all fertility treatment is deferred, not just IVF. This is same for those having treatment with donor gametes, a surrogate and all other treatments including oral medication for ovulation induction.

The exceptions are treatment for fertility preservation for clinical reasons for example prior to commencing chemotherapy and donation of sperm or eggs.

### **I am self-funding, does this policy apply to me?**

The decision to temporarily defer fertility treatment for unvaccinated women was taken on the grounds of patient safety in light of evidence of increased risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy, the uncertainty about the impacts of the Omicron variant and the high level of virus incidence at the present time.

These risk factors are the same for all patients seeking fertility treatment, therefore this policy applies to all patients having treatment in NHS Centres or University Centres in Scotland, not just NHS patients.

### **Will I have to provide evidence?**

Yes. You should make sure you have a record of your vaccination status. You can find more information here on how to do that: [Get a record of your coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination status | The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)

Your vaccination status will be checked when you come in to the centre.

### **If I wait, I will be more than 40. Will this compromise my eligibility for NHS treatment?**

All patients having treatment temporarily deferred will have the deferral time added back on to their treatment journey to ensure that no patient loses out on treatment.

### **Can I go through stimulation and freeze embryos?**

No, this will not be possible unless it is for fertility preservation for clinical reasons for example prior to commencing chemotherapy.

### **Will there be a further deferral?**

The treatment deferral is temporary and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Decisions will be guided by the data and evidence and Centres will keep websites updated. Centres will inform those patients affected should the situation change.

If you are waiting for fertility treatment, our advice is to make sure you are as up to date as possible with your COVID-19 vaccination as the best way to protect yourself now and in a future pregnancy.

### **Can I expedite my vaccinations?**

It is possible, in certain situations and with clinical support, to expedite treatment by reducing the gap between two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to a minimum of 3 weeks as an exceptional case based on clinical need but still within the authorised schedule. You should speak to your clinician if you wish to explore this.

### **I have already had COVID-19 twice. Can my recovery certificate be used instead of a vaccination?**

No, your recovery certificate cannot be used instead of vaccination.

If you are within 4 weeks of testing positive for COVID-19 you are not eligible for COVID-19 vaccination or the booster, however, you can get your vaccine as soon as you are eligible and can recommence treatment once you are vaccinated.

Having the vaccine cuts the chances of catching COVID-19 and reduces the risk of being seriously ill or hospitalised if you do get it.

### **If the risks are in pregnancy, why is my partner encouraged to be vaccinated?**

We are encouraging everyone to have vaccination although we are deferring treatment if the intended mother is not fully vaccinated. The reason partners are encouraged to have the vaccination is because if they get infected, this will increase your risk of infection, even if you are vaccinated. If you are infected you will need to isolate and will not be able to come to the Centre for monitoring/ treatment, so the advice is based on reducing the risk of disruption to your treatment.

### **Counselling offer**

We appreciate that this may be difficult news for you and we know that undergoing fertility treatment can be an extremely emotional experience for an individual or a couple. Each Centre has counselling services available to all patients who require this service. Please contact your referral clinic by email for further information.

### **Is it safe to take the COVID-19 vaccine if I am currently donating, or planning to donate my eggs or sperm?**

Yes. Covid-19 vaccines do not contain any virus and so you cannot pass on Covid-19 by receiving the vaccine. The Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority state that you must allow at least 7 days from the most recent vaccination prior to donating eggs or sperm. Ovarian stimulation for egg donors can start once 7 days have passed. If the donor feels unwell after the vaccination, they must not donate for 7 days after their symptoms have got better [www.hfea.gov.uk/treatments/covid-19-and-fertility-treatment/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance\[1\]for-patients/frequently-asked-questions-for-patients-on-coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/treatments/covid-19-and-fertility-treatment/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance[1]for-patients/frequently-asked-questions-for-patients-on-coronavirus-covid-19/).

### **Can I still have treatment for fertility preservation if I am not vaccinated?**

Yes. Treatment for fertility preservation prior to urgent medical treatment, for example chemotherapy, does not require you to be vaccinated.

### **What is the evidence?**

The latest evidence from the [UK Obstetric Surveillance System \(UKOSS\)](#) and the [Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK \(MBRRACE-UK\)](#) showed that disproportionately high numbers of unvaccinated pregnant women and their babies have died after admission to hospital with COVID-19 and 98% of pregnant women in ICU with COVID-19 were unvaccinated.

In addition, recent data reported by [Public Health Scotland](#), shows that pregnant women with COVID-19 have a significantly higher risk of severe disease requiring admission to critical care than non-pregnant women of a similar age.

With the arrival of the Delta variant increased numbers of pregnant women have been admitted to hospital with moderate to severe COVID-19 symptoms requiring critical care. [The Scottish Intensive Care Society Report \(SICSAG\) Report, published on 13 October,](#) highlighted that of the 89 COVID-19 positive pregnant women who were

admitted to critical care in Scotland between December 2020 and end September 2021, 88 were unvaccinated, 1 was partially vaccinated, and none were fully vaccinated.

In light of this evidence, on 16 December 2021 the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (the JCVI) recommended that, in the context of vaccination, pregnant women should now be considered as a high clinical risk group and part of the priority 6 group within the vaccination programme [JCVI advice on vaccinating pregnant women](#).

In addition to the above, the evidence of the high and increasing incidence of the virus in Scotland, ongoing uncertainty around the high transmissibility and unknown impact of the Omicron variant on pregnant women, were taken into account.