



**Clear link emerges between COVID-19 and pregnancy complications**

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# Clear link emerges between COVID-19 and pregnancy complications

A new study finds that COVID-19 is linked to a 60% to 97% increase in preterm birth.

By **Jocelyn Kaiser** | Apr. 22, 2021 , 11:00 AM

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Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that **COVID-19 hits pregnant women harder than the general population**. Now, one of the first large studies with a proper control group has firmed up earlier evidence for how the virus can alter the course of pregnancy and harm mothers and their newborns.

The study of more than 2100 pregnant women enrolled at hospitals in 18 countries found that, compared with uninfected pregnant women, those with COVID-19 are at higher risk for severe illness, death, pregnancy complications, and preterm birth. Those results underscore the importance of including pregnant women in priority groups for COVID-19 vaccines and limiting their exposure to ill people,

Clear differences emerged between the two groups. Those with COVID-19 had a 76% greater chance of pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, known as preeclampsia or eclampsia. They were three times as likely to have a severe infection and **five times as likely to be admitted to an intensive care unit**, Papageorghiou's team reports today in *JAMA Pediatrics*. Eleven women with COVID-19 died, compared with just one woman in the uninfected group.

The study also linked COVID-19 to a 60% to 97% increased rate of preterm birth, and— in infected women with a fever and shortness of breath—to a fivefold increase in neonatal complications such as immature lungs, brain damage, and eye disorders. About 13% of babies tested positive for the virus, and cesarean delivery was linked to a higher risk of transmission. Breastfeeding didn't appear to transmit the virus—a small bit of good news.

The risk estimates are roughly in line with what other studies have found, Papageorghiou says, including a **recently published study** that looked at health records for more than 400,000 U.S. pregnant women, nearly 6400 with COVID-19.



The European Medicines Agency paved the way this week for Europe's use of a COVID-19 vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson, but questions persist about a rare clotting side effect linked to it and a similar vaccine made by AstraZeneca. ROB

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