

# Knowledge and beliefs of healthcare staff regarding vaccination against COVID-19 in pregnant and breastfeeding women



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## Introduction

The safety and efficacy of vaccination against COVID-19 for pregnant or breastfeeding woman has been well established. However, due to rapid scientific advances in the area, there was less time to educate healthcare staff in how to provide patient counselling when compared to other vaccination rollouts. Due to the high rates of COVID-19 experienced in South Western Sydney, New South Wales, and the wide range of beliefs regarding the virus and immunisation that are held by the community, it is of the utmost importance that the healthcare workers providing maternity care in this community can provide informed and accurate counselling.

## Objectives

To assess the knowledge and attitude of healthcare staff toward vaccination against COVID-19 in pregnant and breastfeeding women at the start of the vaccination rollout in an area affected with high rates of COVID-19.

## Methodology

An anonymous structured online questionnaire was distributed to all healthcare staff working in maternity services in four hospitals in the South Western Sydney Local Health District, NSW between the 10<sup>th</sup> September to the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. The questionnaire assessed how confident staff felt when counselling women about COVID-19 vaccination, how often they were providing counselling, and how likely they were to recommend COVID-19 vaccination. The questionnaire also assessed the respondent's vaccination status.

## Results

52 responses were received from doctors, midwives, student midwives, and nurses working in maternity. 88.46% reported they were very likely to recommend COVID-19 vaccination to pregnant women, and 84.62% reported they were very likely to recommend it breastfeeding women. Only 28.85% of respondents reported feeling extremely confident in counselling women about the vaccination. Only 38.46% reported feeling confident in providing women with relevant written materials providing information on the matter. 51 of the 52 respondents had received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccination themselves, with only one respondent having received only one dose. No respondents were unvaccinated. When asked how frequently the respondents were discussing COVID-19 vaccination with their antenatal and postnatal patients, only 53.85% of healthcare workers replied that they discussed it with 80-100% of their antenatal patients, and only 28% of healthcare workers replied that they discussed it with 80-100% of their postnatal patients.

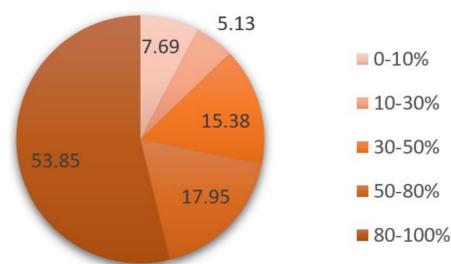


Figure 1. Chart of responses the to the question "Out of all the antenatal patients that you have reviewed, with what percentage have you discussed COVID-19 vaccination?"

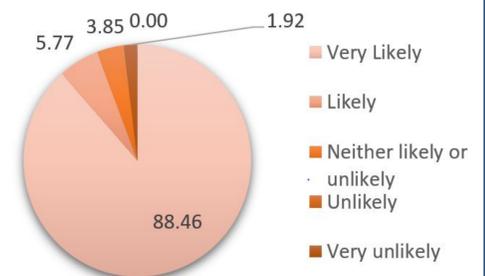
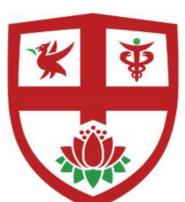


Figure 2. Chart of responses the to the question "How likely are you to recommend COVID-19 vaccination to pregnant women?"

## Discussion & Conclusion

Most healthcare workers would recommend COVID-19 vaccination in pregnant and breastfeeding women, however there are still a number who could benefit with more education to support their confidence in counselling patients. One area of improvement includes better education about the availability of written resources for patients. Another area which could be greatly improved is how frequently healthcare workers were counselling women about the importance of vaccination, particularly at postnatal reviews. This is of particular importance as women who were previously objecting to vaccination in pregnancy may be more amenable to accepting vaccination postnatally. Overall, the results were reassuring that most healthcare workers felt positively towards encouraging patients to be vaccinated. It should be noted however, that there may be an element of bias in that healthcare workers who harboured antivaccination sentiments may have been less likely to respond to the survey or less trusting of data collection on the matter. Of note, the survey occurred before NSW Health introduced a policy of mandatory COVID-19 vaccination for all healthcare workers.



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