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Commentary

Association between Maternal COVID-19 Vaccination and Neonatal Immune Response

Aronoff Amelie*

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America

DESCRIPTION

Maternal immunization has long been a fundamental aspect of preventive healthcare, safeguarding both pregnant individuals and their offspring from infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the significance of this practice, with maternal COVID-19 vaccination becoming a focal point of public health discussions. A key area of interest lies in understanding how maternal vaccination influences neonatal immune responses, affecting both immediate and long-term health outcomes. Maternal vaccination serves a dual purpose: It protects the mother against severe disease during pregnancy and confers passive immunity to the fetus through the placental transfer of antibodies. The transfer of maternal antibodies to neonates provides them with critical protection against infections during the first few months of life, when their immune systems are still developing. In the context of COVID-19, vaccines designed to elicit a strong humoral response have demonstrated the potential to protect both mothers and their newborns. The mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccines, including those developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, have shown high efficacy in generating robust antibody responses. Studies indicate that these antibodies can cross the placenta, resulting in detectable levels in neonates at birth. This passive immunity may offer protection against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection during the early neonatal period. The transfer of maternal antibodies to the fetus is mediated by Neonatal Fc Receptors (FcRn) in the placenta. These receptors facilitate the selective transfer of IgG antibodies, which are essential for neonatal immunity. Factors such as the timing of vaccination during pregnancy, maternal antibody levels and placental efficiency influence the extent of antibody transfer. Research suggests that vaccination during the second or early third trimester optimizes the transfer of protective antibodies to the fetus. This timing ensures that antibody levels peak during the later stages of pregnancy when transplacental transfer is most efficient. The quality and quantity of antibodies transferred are also dependent on the maternal immune response elicited by the vaccine, highlighting the importance of vaccine formulation and administration schedules. Neonates born to vaccinated mothers exhibit detectable levels of SARS-CoV-2-specific IgG antibodies at birth. These antibodies are believed to provide temporary protection against COVID-19, reducing the risk of severe disease and complications during early infancy. Additionally, the presence of maternal antibodies may influence the neonate's subsequent immune responses to SARS-CoV-2 infection or vaccination. Passive immunity is inherently transient, with maternal antibodies waning over time. However, the initial protection afforded during the neonatal period is invaluable, particularly in reducing morbidity and mortality associated with infectious diseases. Emerging evidence suggests that maternal COVID-19 vaccination may also modulate the neonate's innate and adaptive immune responses, potentially enhancing their ability to mount effective immune defenses against pathogens. Beyond the immediate protection against SARS-CoV-2, maternal vaccination may have broader implications for neonatal health.

- The durability of passive immunity conferred by maternal antibodies.
- The impact of maternal vaccination on neonatal immune development and responses to subsequent vaccinations.
- The effects of emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants on vaccine efficacy and antibody transfer.
- Strategies to optimize vaccination timing and coverage during pregnancy.

The presence of maternal antibodies could reduce hospitalizations and medical interventions associated with COVID-19, thereby lowering healthcare burdens. Moreover, maternal vaccination may contribute to reducing vertical transmission risks, although this remains an area of ongoing investigation. It is also critical to consider the potential impacts on long-term immunity. While maternal antibodies provide temporary protection, they may interact with the neonate's developing immune system, shaping responses to subsequent infections or vaccinations. Understanding these interactions is

Correspondence to: Aronoff Amelie, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America, E-mail: anoff@vadbt.com

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essential for optimizing maternal immunization strategies and ensuring sustained protection for neonates.

CONCLUSION

Despite the benefits of maternal COVID-19 vaccination, hesitancy persists among some pregnant individuals, driven by concerns about vaccine safety and potential effects on fetal development. Robust data from clinical trials and real-world studies have demonstrated that COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy, with no significant adverse outcomes for mothers or their infants. Communicating these findings effectively is essential for building trust and encouraging vaccine uptake. Healthcare providers play a critical role in addressing vaccine hesitancy, providing evidence-based information and fostering informed decision-making. Collaborative efforts between healthcare professionals, public health authorities and community leaders are needed to enhance awareness of the benefits of maternal vaccination and dispel misinformation.