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REDUCING SEVERE COMPLICATIONS

'LET WOMEN 33 WEEKS INTO PREGNANCY GET VACCINATED'

Lifting gestation limit will reduce risk of them becoming Category 3, 4 or 5 patients, says doctor

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HEALTH experts are calling on the government to allow pregnant women 33 weeks or more into their pregnancy to be inoculated with the Covid-19 vaccine.

Consultant obstetrician, gynaecologist and maternal medicine specialist at Prince Court Medical Centre Dr Shilpa Nambiar said removing the gestation restriction to allow pregnant mothers to receive the vaccine would reduce the risk of them becoming Category 3, 4 or 5 Covid-19 patients.

"We need to appeal to the government to remove the gestation restriction for pregnant mothers.

"There is no evidence of harm and people, especially pregnant women, should get the vaccine," she told the *New Straits Times* when contacted.

Dr Shilpa said there were more reasons for expectant mothers to get the vaccine, especially if they experienced a complicated pregnancy, which would require them to see their doctors.

"There are some women who are naturally at high risk of getting severe infections with pre-existing medical conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes.



Nurshahirah Hassan, 27, who is eight months' pregnant, getting vaccinated at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre PPV yesterday. PIC BY SAIFULLIZAN TAMADI

"So, I usually advise them to get the vaccine because we know that being inoculated will reduce severe complications, should they get infected."

In July, the United Kingdom's Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology published guidelines that recommended vaccination against Covid-19 at any stage of pregnancy.

The Covid-19 National Immunisation Programme currently administers the vaccine to women who are between 14 and 33 weeks pregnant.

Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur head of obstetrics and gynaecology Dr Premitha Damodaran echoed similar views.

She said expectant mothers should have a doctor's recommendations and their acknowledgement that they understood about the vaccine.

She suggested allowing expectant mothers to walk-in to vaccination centres, which should have a separate section for them, as pregnant women were in the high-risk category.

"Like all vaccines, or any other thing that we require during pregnancy, we don't like to disturb the foetus' development during the first trimester.

"In some countries, expectant mothers are given until 36 weeks into their pregnancy to be fully vaccinated. We want mothers to receive the two doses before they deliver.

"And I will tell my patients to take the second dose within three weeks before delivery as you can do so with some vaccines, including Pfizer-BioNtech, or you can take it immediately after delivery."

Dr Premitha stressed on the importance of pregnant women being vaccinated as they would be at risk of developing serious complications should they get infected. She said if pregnant women developed severe complications due to Covid-19, the survival rate of their unborn babies would be low.

"The third trimester is serious business because the baby is growing, which results in women experiencing shortness in breath, getting tired easily and unable to sleep well until you give birth.

"Just imagine if you have lung infection and, in some cases, it can trigger early labour.

"We doctors, either in Malaysia or around the world, will always tell you that pregnant women who catch the Covid-19 virus will deteriorate faster."

She said she would often recommend patients in the third trimester of their pregnancy to get admitted for observation if they get Covid-19.

Sultanah Bahiyah Hospital consultant in reproductive medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology Dr Murizah Mohd Zain said unvaccinated pregnant women faced twice the risk of being admitted to the Intensive Care Unit and three times the risk of needing respiratory assistance should they get Covid-19.

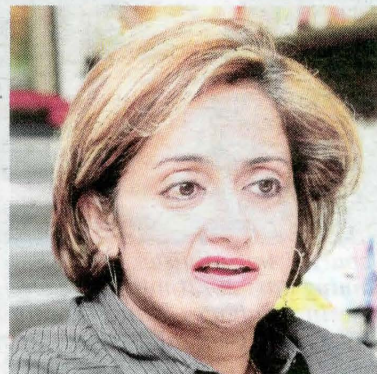
She told *Berita Harian* that things would go south fast should they get the Delta variant or when they became Category 4 or 5 patients.

She said a decision must then be made to induce early delivery even if the baby is premature.

"This is to enable more optimal respiratory assistance and



Dr Shilpa Nambiar



Dr Premitha Damodaran



Dr Murizah Mohd Zain

medicine to save the mother's life.

"Almost two-thirds of pregnant women with Covid-19 do not have any symptom and only experience mild symptoms, such as fever and flu.

"Only some get severe infections."

Dr Premitha said post-delivery measures included getting those looking after the mother and baby to stay in the same house throughout the confinement period.

On whether women who try to conceive should postpone their plans, Dr Premitha said: "Compared with two months ago, we are now at a better place. More people are getting the vaccine, and Covid-19 is not showing any sign of going away any time soon.

"It is unfair to tell people to delay their pregnancy when Covid-19 has been around for almost two years."

Dr Shilpa said those undergoing fertility treatment should get themselves inoculated.

"There is no reason for you to delay getting the vaccine just because you are trying to conceive. The vaccine will not impact the pregnancy."

PRAYER TIMES

	SUBUH (am)	SYURUK	ZUHUR	ASAR (pm)	MAGHRIB	ISYAK
Melaka	6:00	7:10	1:18	4:36	7:23	8:35
Penang	6:04	7:13	1:26	4:41	7:34	8:45
K. Lumpur	6:01	7:11	1:21	4:38	7:27	8:39
Johor Baru	5:55	7:05	1:12	4:31	7:16	8:28
Kuantan	5:56	7:07	1:15	4:33	7:21	8:32
Ipoh	6:03	7:10	1:24	4:40	7:31	8:42