mRNA vaccination for pregnant women: Study contained a gross error

Martina Frei / 9.04.2025

The US health authorities miscalculated. Nevertheless, their study played a key role in the vaccination recommendation. Also in Switzerland.

Before the Covid vaccines were approved, they were not tested on pregnant women. Under the impression that the coronavirus was more likely to lead to severe courses of disease in pregnant women - especially those with risk factors mit Risikofaktoren - the German Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (DGGG) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gynäkologie und Geburtshilfe recommended in May 2021 that pregnant women be "prioritized" for vaccination against Covid.

Pfizer is one of the DGGG's sponsors Sponsoren. Ten other medical societies and working groups endorsed its recommendation (see box below). In doing so, they disregarded the recommendation of the German Vaccination Commission in force at the time.

The professional societies cited a study by the US health authority CDC as one of the few important pieces of evidence for the safety of mRNA vaccination in pregnant women. It was published in the New England Journal of Medicine on April 21, 2021 «New England Journal of Medicine».

For this study, vaccinated pregnant women who took part in a voluntary reporting system by cell phone were contacted several times by telephone. How often this happened was not disclosed. nicht mitgeteilt

The study authors only mentioned that a "limited number of calls" had been made. Data from other reporting systems on suspected side effects were also included in the study.

In general, inquiries are more reliable than the usual reporting systems, where authorities wait for doctors or patients to report suspected side effects themselves. However, these "preliminary findings on the safety of mRNA Covid-19 vaccination in pregnant women" - the title of the study - had significant shortcomings.

As a result of the survey, the CDC study authors stated: "Preliminary results showed no obvious warning signs in pregnant individuals." The words "preliminary" and "obvious"

did not suggest a result that would provide safety for pregnant women.

Even before these data were available, the US authority CDC had already informed on January 7, 2021: "Based on the mechanism of action of the mRNA vaccines, experts believe it is 'unlikely' «unwahrscheinlich» that the mRNA vaccines pose a specific risk to pregnant women."

A gross miscalculation that slipped through everyone's fingers

The widely cited CDC study was referred to by medical associations and authorities in many countries, including the Swiss Society of Gynecology and Obstetrics Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Gynäkologie und Geburtshilfe and the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH). It served as an important basis for recommending the mRNA corona vaccination to pregnant women.

However, this study contained a glaring miscalculation. Obviously, neither the authors, nor the reviewers, nor the editors of this renowned medical journal, nor the editorialist, or the vast majority of those who cited this study had noticed it.

According to the study, 12.6 percent of women who were vaccinated shortly before or shortly after the start of pregnancy suffered a miscarriage before the 20th week of pregnancy. This rate was within the normal range. However, the authors of the study had chosen the wrong denominator for this risk calculation.

If calculated correctly, 82 percent of these women had a miscarriage. This was an "alarming incidence, three to eight times higher than in the comparison population", scientists Wissenschaftler - and also vaccination skeptics - later remarked. «alarmierende Inzidenz

A lot of data was missing

In addition, the study authors did not yet know the outcome of the pregnancy for almost 96% of the study participants who had been vaccinated shortly before pregnancy or in the first two trimesters of pregnancy. Only around 70 percent of those who had only been vaccinated in the last trimester knew.

Another gap: In the case of miscarriages, it was not stated which of the two mRNA vaccines the women had been vaccinated with. This distinction between the vaccines was made for other side effects.

Moreover, the study did not even include five percent of vaccinated pregnant women nicht einmal fünf Prozentand was not representative nicht repräsentativ.

It also did not allow any conclusions to be drawn keine Schlüsse as to whether the mRNA vaccinations led to more miscarriages or more congenital malformations and whether they are safe, particularly in the first trimester of pregnancy. The child's organs form during this first trimester.

Nevertheless, the editorialist wrote in the "New England Journal of Medicine": "These are reassuring data based on reports from pregnant women, most of whom were vaccinated in the third trimester."

Swiss authorities issued a hasty all-clear

Obviously, the Swiss Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the FOPH and the Vaccination Commission did not check the CDC study for weaknesses either. In a joint statement at the end of May 2021, they wrote: "To date, well over 200,000 pregnant women in the US have been vaccinated with the mRNA vaccines against Covid-19, with no evidence of unexpected side effects on mother and child.

At the end of April 2021, a [...] registry study of over 35,000 vaccinated pregnant women was published, which shows no evidence of direct or indirect adverse effects of vaccination on pregnancy, embryonic/fetal development, birth or postnatal development."

That was full-bodied. After all, over 35,000 pregnant women were registered with the voluntary US reporting system. However, the number of data actually evaluated was much smaller: the study authors only knew the outcome of 827 pregnancies at the time.

And 700 of these women had only been vaccinated in the last trimester of pregnancy. After all, women in Switzerland were advised at the time not to get vaccinated against Covid in the first trimester of pregnancy.

It was made possible for all other pregnant women and recommended for those with risk factors.

When the vaccination campaign was already underway, the authors admitted their mistake

In September 2021 - when the vaccination of pregnant women had long been underway - the study authors admitted their miscalculation and corrected themselves. In April, they had written that the rate of miscarriages among vaccinated women was comparable to that of previous studies before the

pandemic. They have now deleted this statement. löschten sie diese Aussage.

The editorialist in the New England Journal of Medicine now also stated that no conclusions could be drawn about miscarriages. Previously, she had only pointed out that it was not yet possible to draw any definitive conclusions regarding congenital malformations and other potentially rare consequences in babies.

In addition, the authors of the CDC study have now revealed that of 1224 women who were vaccinated around the time of conception or in early pregnancy, 905 (or 74 percent) did not even know what had happened to their pregnancy.

This is why the miscarriage rate of 82 percent was not correct. Although it was calculated correctly, it was only based on a minority of these women).

Updated figures show nothing worrying

At the same time, the study authors provided updated figures. These showed that the rate of miscarriages was within the range that would have been expected even without Covid vaccination. The number of unreported cases had also decreased: now only 10 percent of women did not know how their pregnancy was progressing.

"The risk of spontaneous abortion between the 6th and 20th week of pregnancy appears to be in line with the values published for historical cohorts," two Polish scientists stated in the Journal of Reproductive Immunology.

They strongly criticized the premature publication, the incorrect calculation and other points. They also pointed out that the updated results were not representative of the general population.

Studies with pregnant women "urgently needed"

Critics and study authors agreed on one point: a longer follow-up period of vaccinated pregnant women and complete data are needed, including women who were vaccinated around the time of conception or in early pregnancy.

In March 2024, the study authors announced further results "shortly". However, there is still no update kein Update on the results of this study on pregnant women. We are waiting for the CDC to release the results we were told on request.

But even if updated results are published at some point, a fundamental problem remains: many women could not be reached for a survey, the study is not representative, a lot of data

is missing and there are various factors that can distort the results.

The editorialist in the “New England Journal of Medicine” (NEJM) «New England Journal of Medicine» called for: It is “urgently necessary” to intensify the follow-up of vaccinated pregnant women so that many more women are included, and pregnant women should be included in studies.

Such a study by Pfizer is already underway. But this study is a separate chapter.