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Oifig Treoir Chliniciúil FnaSS – Ionfhabtú a bhaineann le curam sláinte agus frithsheasmhacht in aghaidh antaibheathaigh

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Pregnant Healthcare workers (HCW) and other HCWs and the risks from COVID-19 in the DELAY phase

v1.0, 19/03/2020

In this context “other HCWs” are people who are at increased risk of serious disease and may include those with pre-existing cardio-pulmonary conditions and those with impaired immune function due to underlying disease (for example HIV infection) or medication.

Immunocompromised or immunodeficiency can be classified as primary or secondary (<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/guidelines/> Chapter 3). The definition of immunocompromised is challenging, at a minimum it includes those people defined in the National Immunisation Guidelines as not suitable for administration of live virus vaccines. Clinical judgement may require that certain other categories of HCWs are also considered immunocompromised.

Many HCW's are extremely anxious at this time regarding COVID-19. While extreme anxiety may impair task performance there is no capacity to manage this as a specific occupational health risk under current pressures on the healthcare system and it is preferable if these situations are managed locally with appropriate psychosocial supports

Risk of acquiring COVID-19 Infection

There is no evidence and no reason to expect that HCW's who are pregnant, who are otherwise immunocompromised or who have other conditions that place them at high risk of severe disease are substantially more likely to become infected with COVID-19 than non-pregnant HCW's.

Consequences of acquiring COVID-19 Infection

Although there is limited information at the moment to suggest that COVID-19 infection is associated with increased risk in pregnancy there is experience with other respiratory virus including the original SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV of adverse outcomes for the woman and for the baby.

There is limited information at the moment regarding COVID-19 infection and immune-compromise but there are indications that outcomes may be worse for patients with comorbidities and this is consistent with experience with other respiratory viruses.

Equity of Exposure and Continuity of Service

Allowing healthcare workers who are pregnant, who are otherwise immunocompromised or who have other conditions that place them at high risk of severe disease to avoid exposure to patients who are being evaluated for infection with COVID-19 infection or who have confirmed COVID-19 infection may significantly reduce the pool of HCWs available to care for these patients and may result in disproportionate exposure of other HCWs.

It is likely that most other HCWs would accept this disproportionate exposure if a reasonable justification based on predisposition to severe disease.

Conclusion

Healthcare workers who are pregnant, who are otherwise immunocompromised or who have other conditions that place them at high risk of severe disease but who adhere to recommended Infection Prevention and Control precautions are unlikely to be at greater risk of acquiring COVID-19 virus infection compared with other HCW's and do not need to be excluded from providing care to such patients.

Where possible and consistent with expressed preference of the healthcare worker it is pragmatic to allocate healthcare workers who are pregnant, who are otherwise immunocompromised or who have other conditions that place them at high risk of severe disease to the care of other patients whenever practical.