

TRANSCRIPT

Jerome (Community Health Champions project) talks to young mum Clare about pregnancy and childbirth during the coronavirus pandemic.

Date: 6th August 2021.

Location: Better World Festival, Stoke-on-Trent.

Starting a family is always a huge step for any young couple to take.

It's full of joy and excitement, but never without its worries.

The Covid pandemic has heightened concerns and added further questions to consider - is now the right time to bring a baby into the world? And what about getting vaccinated whilst you're pregnant, is it safe or not?

I'm Jerome, at the Community Health Champions project.

I've been chatting with Clare. Clare is a young mum who's recently given birth to her 2nd child, baby Scarlet, who's now just one month old.

We met up at Stoke-on-Trent's Better World Festival - you can hear the World Music stage in the background.

I began by asking Clare what first went through her mind when she found out she was pregnant in the middle of the pandemic.

I suppose, back then, when I first knew, it was that point where everyone hoped it would all be over. So I think my first thought was probably, oh well, hopefully I'll be one of the more fortunate ones because just a few months earlier than that, everyone was still having to be completely on their own. And you're hearing stories about people giving birth and on their own in car parks, waiting like the old days. And that seems really hard and tough. Of course, it's all sort of come back round. So it's been kind of good and bad in a lot of ways. In one sense, my work had changed. So I was sitting at home for the whole of lockdown. My work changed to completely home-based, so that was easier than the previous time I was pregnant. And the appointments have been okay. I haven't had too much remote stuff, on the whole I've been seen in person when I've needed to. But positive things, like the GPs would would like ring you up and see if they needed to see you. So I haven't found it's been too bad really. And my partner was able to come to appointments by about halfway through and see scans and was able to come to the hospital for parts of the time, if not all the time. So it has kind of been mixed really. But I suppose it's worrying, and this is where the COVID thing came back. I wasn't somebody who thought of myself as vulnerable to getting ill. Although obviously everybody can get really ill off it. But knowing that I was going to get to that later stage made me sort of think, actually, I become one of the vulnerable people and when they did start to lift restrictions, that was point where you really start to get nervous of what's going to happen, and whether you're going to suddenly be one of the people that really needs to shield and stay away from everyone else.

Do you feel as though you got good advice when you needed it?

Yeah, really, really good. I suppose I've been confident enough to ask questions and do research. So it's always different. So if people struggle with that. I think there's so much information. Last time I had a child was five, six years ago, when there weren't as many online forums, there wasn't as much chatter about absolutely everything. So yeah, I'd always found I could ask my consultants at the hospital questions, and saw the midwives face-to-face, so I could always ask them questions. So it wasn't too bad. The sort of nerve-wracking thing was that you were obviously working with science changing. So at the beginning of pregnancy there was no vaccine. It came through around Christmas. At that point they were advising not to get it, so you can completely understand why people would be worried that the advice has suddenly changed. Do I react now or do I wait longer? So that's different, I think during pregnancy than any other point.

Were you hesitant to get vaccinated?

I wasn't really. Obviously it was about waiting for the message to change, but I think I was quicker off the mark than the medics really. I'd spoken to my consultants and said 'do you have a view on it' when they were starting? They'd been giving it to health workers for a while. So I knew they'd been giving it to a lot of people. I think I'd read an article to say lots of people in America had had it and it was okay. So I spoke to my consultant and he just basically said he'd be okay with me having it when it kicked in for my age group. And the advice just changed a few days after that. So I rang the GP and they'd not heard the change in advice. So the slightly harder thing was persuading them that I needed to get an appointment. And then when I got to my appointment, they were offering the wrong vaccine. So there's a bit of back and forth about to be alert, because you've been advised not to get the AstraZeneca one. So I had to be alert enough, getting to the end of the queue, and sort of say 'no, no, actually I'm not supposed to have this one'. And they all conferred and they said 'no, no, you're not supposed to have this one come back tomorrow'. So yeah, I got it quite quickly off the mark, and I feel quite strongly that people should. I think since hearing about some of the experiences of women getting really, really sick and mums dying from it, who would be healthy and in their thirties, otherwise I think having seen a lot of that, I was keen to get it as soon as I could. I only was able to get vaccinated the once before I gave birth because of the timing of the age groups. So yeah, I would've had it sooner really, if possible.

What words of reassurance or advice would you give to other women that are pregnant at the moment?

I think I'd just say go and talk to the people who were there who were looking at this information all the time, people do feel like they're being pushed into decisions and I don't think anyone should feel pushed. As with everything during pregnancy, it should be your choice, but I think there's so much good data now and so much evidence. I think it's getting on for a hundred thousand women have had it now. And there's been no difference to the rest of the population. So I would, I would certainly say go and get advice, but from my point of view, the evidence is there that it's safe and that people should get it because the dangers of getting it from 30 weeks onwards are really, really stark. And that's why people are ending up in intensive care now. And that's a real tragedy when, generally speaking, you're trying to keep as well as you can. You don't want this thing to hit you right now.

What are your concerns, thoughts, hopes for Scarlet's future? I mean, is it frightening to you to have had a child during the pandemic and all of the uncertainties over the next decade or so?

It's frightening in a way. I've just, as you know from Twitter, I've just finished a course where I've been doing a lot about the theory of volatility and systems. So in a sense, this is no surprise that we're getting pandemics, that we're getting chaos, that we're getting all these different huge things happening. I'm probably more worried about climate change and diseases are an element of the world being more connected, more traveled. I hope that we take the opportunity to kind of think about how we live differently. You and I both moved back to Stoke and to some extent that is an adjustment to this changing world. I want to live more sustainably in an area where I can afford, in a place where I don't have to constantly travel and be in a car or constantly commuting into a big city. And that's been quite deliberate in a way, because I think it's a good place to bring up children. And so I suppose, I hope that we all invest in the future and think about what we want.

[baby wakes and cries]

Here she goes, we just got in there. But it is, it is frightening. And I think, I think kids, especially teenagers have got a much better grip on the risks and the things, and hopefully they'll be the ones to lead the way. So it's great what organisations around you are doing with young people, to build up their confidence, because really they're the ones with the answers aren't they?

I'd better let you look after little Scarlet, who wants to put in a little appearance...

If you're pregnant, or planning a pregnancy, you'll find lots of reassuring information referred to on the Community Health Champions website.

CHC.VAST.ORG.UK

I've put the link in the show notes.

**Thank you for listening, and big thanks to Clare for sharing her thoughts.
Until next time, bye for now.**