

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): What You Need to Know During Pregnancy and After Childbirth

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 (coronavirus) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person.

How can I help protect myself from COVID-19 if I am pregnant?

As with influenza (the flu) or any other virus, the best ways to help protect yourself from COVID-19 are to:

- Wear a mask when you go out in public.
- Try to stand 6 feet away from others, do not shake hands and avoid crowds.
- Do not attend large gatherings of people, inside or outside.
- Cover your sneezes or coughs, and throw your tissues in the trash as soon as possible.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Wash your hands often with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
- Clean surfaces in your home with usual household cleaners and disinfectants.

Many pregnant women are also choosing to stay home as much as possible after COVID-19 testing is done between 38 and 39 weeks of pregnancy.

Are pregnant women at risk for getting COVID-19?

Yes. Pregnant women are more susceptible to other viral respiratory infections, like the flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that some pregnant women may experience more severe COVID-19 symptoms than the general population.

Will my baby be OK if I get COVID-19?

Because this is a new virus, there is not a lot of research on how COVID-19 might affect an unborn baby. At this time, it is rare for a pregnant woman with COVID-19 to pass the virus to her baby during pregnancy or birth. Researchers have not found the virus in breastmilk.

With the information available, a baby is more likely to get COVID-19 after delivery when coming in contact with respiratory droplets or an infected person.

According to the CDC, high fevers during the first trimester of pregnancy can increase the risk of certain birth defects. Catching other viral respiratory infections, like the flu, during pregnancy is linked to preterm labor and low birth weight.

What type of prenatal care will I have during this outbreak?

Prenatal care includes many important routine visits. There are many parts of prenatal care that cannot happen outside the clinic.

If you are healthy and have a low-risk pregnancy, you will have the following prenatal visits:

- 12 weeks
(Your first prenatal visit is usually when you are 12 weeks pregnant. You will have an ultrasound to estimate your due date.)
- 16 weeks
- 20 weeks
- 24 weeks
- 28 weeks
- 32 weeks

(over)

- 34 weeks
- 36 weeks
- 38 weeks and then weekly until you deliver your baby.

If you need to be seen more often, your pregnancy care provider will talk about this with you. You may bring one person with you to your prenatal visits.

There are other visit options like telehealth, phone and online visits.

If you need prenatal testing, your pregnancy care provider will schedule this for you.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and what should I do if I think I have them?

Symptoms of COVID-19 vary from mild to severe and include:

- fever or chills
- cough
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- fatigue (tiredness)
- muscle or body aches
- headache
- new loss of smell or taste
- sore throat
- congestion or runny nose
- nausea or vomiting
- diarrhea.

These symptoms are also found in many other common infections.

If you think you have symptoms of COVID-19, please call your pregnancy care provider or primary care provider. He or she will review your symptoms over the phone and then recommend if you should stay home, go to a testing site or clinic for an evaluation, or go to the Emergency Department.

If you have severe shortness of breath, have someone drive you to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

What will happen when I come to the hospital for my baby's birth?

When you arrive at the hospital, you and your support person will be asked a few questions to help determine your risk of having COVID-19. You will also be asked to wear a mask when a hospital staff member enters your room or when you or your support person are outside of your room.

When you are admitted to the hospital, your support person may go with you to the labor and delivery unit. If your COVID-19 test is negative, you may have two support people with you during your labor and birth. If you have not yet had a COVID-19 test, you will be tested.

You will be cared for in a private room. Your health care team will wear protective equipment.

If your support person shows symptoms of COVID-19, he or she will need to leave the hospital. You can have a new support person come to the hospital if he or she has no symptoms.

You and your support person are encouraged to stay in your room as much as possible. Your support person may leave the room to get food or bring in the car seat and other baby items.

What if I have COVID-19 symptoms at the time my baby is born?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, your baby may be at risk of getting the virus after birth. Taking the right precautions may help prevent your baby from getting infected.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says it is OK for a mother and baby to room together. It is important that you wear a mask and wash your hands whenever you are caring for your baby. Your baby's crib may be placed 6 feet from your bed.

Can I still breastfeed my baby?

Yes. If you test positive for COVID-19, you may still breastfeed your baby.

It is recommend that you wear a mask and wash your hands before feeding your baby. Keep your breasts clean and covered by your gown. If your breasts are exposed to respiratory droplets, take a shower or wash them with warm, soapy water.

If you have severe COVID-19 symptoms or are unable to breastfeed your baby, you may pump or express your breastmilk.

When pumping or expressing breastmilk:

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
- Put on a mask.
- After you have pumped or expressed your breastmilk, pour it into the container provided.
- Wipe the surface where the container will be placed with an antibacterial wipe.
- Put a paper towel down on that surface. Place the container on the paper towel.
- Label the breastmilk as directed by your nurse. Place the container in the plastic bag provided.
- You may store the breastmilk in your refrigerator in your room.

What do I need to know about breastfeeding at home?

If you have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19, it is important to take special steps to reduce exposing your baby to the virus. This includes washing your hands and wearing a mask until these three things have happened:

- you have gone 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines

and

- other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath are better)

and

- at least 10 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

If pumping or expressing breastmilk, wash your hands before touching any pump or bottle parts. Follow the manual instructions to clean the pump properly after each use. If possible, consider having someone who is healthy care for and feed the breastmilk to your baby.

If anyone has COVID-19, they should remain separated (home isolation precautions) from other family members in the house, including your baby, except for breastfeeding. Ideally, if there is a healthy adult in your house, he or she should care for your baby.

What will happen when it is time to leave the hospital?

If you have COVID-19 you will be able to leave the hospital when you and your health care provider decide it is right for you.

If you are not ready to leave the hospital, but your baby is, he or she may be able to go home with a healthy caregiver. This caregiver will be given instructions on how to care for your baby.

When you are ready to leave the hospital, continue home isolation as directed by your health care provider.

Talk with your health care team about when you and your baby should have follow-up visits.