

Advice for new mothers during COVID-19



Pregnancy, childbirth and caring for newborns

Many expectant families are understandably concerned about the possible impact of COVID-19 on them and their babies' health. Some tips to stay healthy remain the same as for the general population – wash your hands frequently, avoid touching your face, practice social distancing. But there are other considerations those who are expecting need to bear in mind.

Are pregnant women more at risk of getting infected or developing severe symptoms?

According to the Harvard Health Blog, no evidence currently shows a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 when pregnant. Although data shows pregnant women are more prone to developing more severe flu symptoms, COVID-19 is not the flu – and there is no current evidence that this data applies to COVID-19. However, pregnant women can be more at risk of some respiratory infections due to changes in their bodies and immune systems, so it's important to take precautions and monitor any possible symptoms.

What about exposure to COVID-19 during prenatal visits or time spent in the hospital after birth?

Some health providers are recommending spacing out in-person visits and increasing prenatal telehealth visits to lessen the chance of exposure. As for delivery, as the Harvard Health Blog explains, hospitals are making sure “that anyone who needs to be evaluated for COVID-19 will be isolated from other patients.” The number of delivery room visitors and visitors after birth are minimized, and in some cases, only medical personnel can be present during delivery.

What should a pregnant woman do if she has a fever, cough or other symptoms that might indicate COVID-19?

Women who are expecting and who have symptoms that may indicate COVID-19 should always call their doctor before they go into the office to limit their chance of contracting or spreading the virus. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has provided guidelines about how to manage pregnant patients who may have COVID-19 – that is, a woman's obstetrician may prefer to talk about symptoms over the phone to make an informed decision about whether it is necessary to come in for a checkup.

What is the risk of a fetus or newborn catching the disease from a mother with COVID-19?

There have been only a few small studies exploring this topic. So far, most show no or very low risk of passing the virus on to a newborn. Also, according to the World Health Organization, the virus has not been found in amniotic fluid or breastmilk.

Can the COVID-19 virus create complications during pregnancy, even if the baby is not infected?

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there is no documented increased risk of miscarriage or chance of fetal malformations. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does note a possible higher risk of preterm birth.

Can women with COVID-19 breastfeed?

Yes, the CDC says women can breastfeed if they choose to. A breastfeeding woman should wash her hands thoroughly before touching her infant or a breast pump, and wear a cloth face mask covering her nose and mouth while breastfeeding.

How can pregnant women manage stress and anxiety?

Of course it's important to stay physically healthy by eating nutritious meals, exercising and getting plenty of sleep. But it's also vitally important for a woman pregnant during the COVID-19 pandemic to be able to manage stress and anxiety. This unique time brings unique concerns, and as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists notes, pregnant women need to make sure they are connected with family and friends via phone or online, even while maintaining a social distance. Taking a break from the constant updates and breaking news about the novel coronavirus can also make a difference – it can be helpful to designate the same time each day to keep up with what's going on, but try to avoid the constant stream of television or online news otherwise.

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