

# CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH AND CARING FOR NEWBORNS: ADVICE FOR MOTHERS DURING COVID-19



## PREGNANCY

Being pregnant during the COVID-19 pandemic can be stressful, and it is natural to worry about the effects of the virus on your pregnancy and unborn baby.

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it affects pregnant women. Currently, there is no evidence that suggests pregnant women are at a higher risk of getting COVID-19 or if acquired, having more serious illness. There is also not enough evidence at this time to confirm that a mother can pass COVID-19 to her child during pregnancy. It is important for pregnant women to take the following precautions to help protect themselves from becoming ill:

- ▶ **Stay home** as much as possible, except for important medical appointments, and work from home if possible.
- ▶ **Talk to your doctor, obstetrician or midwife** about the possibility of telephone or videoconference appointments.
- ▶ **Avoid visitors** to your home, unless for medical purposes.
- ▶ **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or, if not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- ▶ Practice **physical distancing**. Keep a distance of at least two metres from others.
- ▶ **Avoid touching** your mouth, nose, and eyes.
- ▶ **Avoid touching frequently touched surfaces** when in public.
- ▶ **Avoid crowded places and peak-hours**. Make limited trips to the store for essentials.
- ▶ **Avoid travel by public transit**.

Pregnant women who are at high risk of complication from COVID-19, including those who have heart or lung disease, diabetes, or a weakened immune system, need to take extra precautions, such as:

- ▶ Asking family, a neighbour or friend to help with essential errands (e.g., picking up prescriptions, buying groceries).
- ▶ Talking with your health care provider about how to protect yourself and ensure you have enough of your prescribed medications and medical supplies.

If you have travelled outside of Canada, had close contact with someone who has or may have COVID-19 in the last 14 days, you need to **quarantine** (self-isolate).

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or are waiting to hear the results of a lab test for COVID-19, you must **isolate at home**.

## CHILDBIRTH

Giving birth during the COVID-19 pandemic can be stressful. It is normal to feel sad, scared or confused. There is currently **not enough evidence to indicate that a mother can pass COVID-19 to her child** during childbirth. It is important to talk to your health care provider about how COVID-19 may affect your birth plan and your family after birth:

- ▶ If you plan to give birth in a hospital or birth centre, talk to your health care provider about your birth plan, and how it may need to change due to COVID-19.
- ▶ Learn about the COVID-19 policies regarding support and visitors.
- ▶ If you plan to give birth at home, talk to your midwife about whether homebirths are still an option in your province or territory, and precautions to take to ensure your home environment is safe.
- ▶ If you have COVID-19, talk to your health care provider about how this may affect giving birth.

Your health care provider may consult other specialists for you or your baby as required.

## BABY CARE

If possible, you and your baby should not leave home unless medically necessary. Once a baby is born, they can get COVID-19 from other people, so it is important to put in place measures to prevent the spread of the infection. If you have or think you have COVID-19, you must **isolate yourself** in your home. This includes practicing **physical distancing** in your home, with the only exception being the baby. You can hold your baby skin-to-skin and stay in the same room as your baby if preferred, especially during the establishment of breastfeeding and for bonding.

If you are **symptomatic** (even if symptoms are mild) you should take all possible **precautions** to avoid spreading the virus to your baby:

- ▶ **Wash your hands often**, especially before and after touching your baby and other children.
- ▶ Practice proper respiratory etiquette
- ▶ Wear a **non-medical mask or face covering** (i.e. **constructed** to completely cover the nose and mouth without gaping, and secured to the head by ties or ear loops) when you are close to your baby (less than 2 metres) and especially during feeding time.
- ▶ Ensure the environment around you is clean and disinfected with **approved hard-surface disinfectants**.



**Breastfeeding** is recommended, when possible, as it has many health benefits and offers the most protection against infection and illness throughout infancy and childhood. The virus that causes COVID-19 **has not been found** in breast milk. Breastfeeding can provide important food security for your baby.

If you have or think you have COVID-19, follow the precautions **listed above when feeding**. In addition, parents should also consider the following:

- ▶ If using a nursing pillow, put a clean towel on the pillow each time you are feeding your baby.
- ▶ If using a breast pump, sterilize your equipment carefully before and after each use. Wash the pump/containers after every use with liquid soap (i.e. dishwashing liquid and warm water). Rinse with hot water for 10–15 seconds.
- ▶ Do not share bottles or breast pump.

If you are too ill to breastfeed or provide routine baby care, you are encouraged to ask a healthy adult to feed and care for the baby. As there is COVID-19 in the home, they should wear a non-medical face **mask** or facial covering and wash their hands frequently when caring for the baby.

## VISITORS AFTER YOUR BABY IS BORN

After your baby is born, friends and family may want to visit and meet your baby. Visitors should not be allowed except for medical purposes. This can be very difficult, but it is important to keep your family safe. You can help celebrate the birth of your new baby by having virtual visits and using online tools. Eventually, family and friends will be able to visit, hold, and embrace you and your baby in person—try to remember that this is temporary and physical distancing is the best way right now to protect your family from COVID-19.

## MENTAL HEALTH

**Parenting during COVID-19** can be challenging, and pregnant/postpartum women are at a higher risk of mental health issues. During this time, these risks may be even higher, and you may not have access to the support and resources you typically would. Parents are encouraged to reach out to family, friends, community supports and their health care provider during this difficult time to talk about their mental health.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CORONAVIRUS:

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**Canada.ca/coronavirus**  
or contact  
**1-833-784-4397**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PREGNANCY, VISIT:

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**www.pregnancyinfo.ca**

