



Department of Health

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Pregnancy and COVID-19

Resources for Pregnant People and their Families

Updated November 19, 2020

Background

The New York State Department of Health (Department) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continue to closely monitor the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In response to the outbreak, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's Executive Order 202 declared a state of emergency on March 7, 2020.

Pregnancy is an exciting and sometimes stressful experience. Being pregnant during a disease outbreak may add extra anxiety and concern for you and those you care about who are pregnant. Health care providers and people who research infections are still learning about the virus that causes COVID-19, including how easily it spreads and affects different at-risk populations.

Currently, the virus is thought to be spread from an infected person to others by respiratory droplets when a person coughs or sneezes and is in close contact with another person. According to the CDC, pregnant people do not appear to be at greater risk of getting COVID-19, but may get sicker when infected with COVID-19. Due to changes that occur during pregnancy, pregnant people may be more susceptible to viral respiratory infections. The most important thing you can do is to protect yourself from getting sick. This includes following the same guidance that is provided to everyone, including people who are not pregnant:

General Infection Prevention Strategies

Overall, pregnant people should take the same precautions as the general public to avoid infection. Strategies pregnant people and their families should use to prevent COVID-19 are the same actions routinely employed for infection prevention to reduce transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or "flu") and include:

Everyone should:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before you eat.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Keep a distance of at least 6 feet to help slow the spread of COVID-19.
- Cover your cough and sneezes with a tissue and discard it in a closed container.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Practice social distancing by staying at least six feet away from others outside of your home; and



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- Wear a mask or cloth face covering when you are out and in areas where social distancing is not possible.

Additionally, people who are at increased risk of severe illness, including pregnant people, should reduce contact with people that do not live with you.

For **people who are sick**:

- Stay home.
- If you have a fever, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicines, such as acetaminophen.
- Keep sick household members away from others. If you have a separate room that is best.
- Use soap and water, a bleach and water solution, or EPA-approved household products. You can make your own cleanser with a mixture of 1 cup of liquid unscented chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of water.
- Avoid sharing personal items.
- Anyone at high risk for complications should talk to their healthcare provider for more information.

For more information about how to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19, visit the New York State Department of Health Coronavirus website at www.health.ny.gov/coronavirus.

It is important for pregnant people and people who care for them to protect themselves from illness. These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will explain what we currently know about COVID-19 and its impact on pregnancy, and give you information on how to stay healthy.

Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 and Pregnancy

General Questions:

If I'm pregnant, am I more likely to get COVID-19?

Pregnant people do not appear more likely to get COVID-19 than others who are not pregnant. However, pregnant people may be more likely to have severe illness from COVID-19 compared to others who are not pregnant.

If I get COVID-19, how sick will I get?

Most pregnant people with COVID-19 have mild or moderate illness that can be treated with over-the-counter medicines. Some pregnant people with COVID-19 have more severe illness, and they may be sicker than people with COVID-19 who are not pregnant. This includes being admitted to a hospital for treatment and support.

Can COVID-19 cause problems for my pregnancy?

There is limited data that suggests that COVID-19 may increase the risk of poor birth outcomes, like preterm birth (giving birth before 37 weeks gestation).



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Who can I talk to about COVID-19 and my pregnancy?

We recommend that you call your health care provider and ask about how COVID-19 might affect you and your baby as your first source of information. If you do look at resources online, we have listed some helpful COVID-19 and pregnancy related links at the end of this document.

During Pregnancy or Delivery:

If I have COVID-19, can I pass it to my baby?

Based on currently available information, it is not likely that you would pass on the virus to your baby before it is born. After a baby is born, it can be exposed to the virus from an infected parent or caregiver. Based on a few published reports, a very small number of babies have tested positive for COVID-19 shortly after birth. We do not know if these babies were infected before, during or after birth.

Can COVID-19 affect my pregnancy?

There have been a small number of reported problems with pregnancy or delivery, like premature delivery (before 37 weeks gestation). However, it is not clear if these problems were because of COVID-19 infection or for other reasons.

Is it safe to go to the hospital for an appointment or to deliver my baby?

If you have an appointment at a hospital, call ahead to find out if there are any changes. Some health care providers may do prenatal visits at a different location.

Hospitals and certified birth centers are the safest places to deliver your baby. In New York State, hospitals must designate separate space for labor and delivery, to keep patients healthy and safe. If you can, call your health care provider before going to the hospital. They will tell you if there are changes to admitting procedures due to COVID-19.

I heard hospitals will not allow visitors into the hospital. Does this mean I cannot have someone with me when I deliver?

In order to limit the spread of infections, hospitals are limiting visitors. For people who come to the hospital to deliver a baby, you may have **one support person and your doula, if you have one**, with you throughout your stay. A support person can be your spouse, partner, or any other person of your choosing. This person and your doula (if you have one) will be the **only support individuals** that are allowed to be present **during your hospital care**. Because this virus affects older people more than younger people, you should avoid choosing a support person who is 60 or older if possible. Your support person cannot have any symptoms of being sick or have been recently sick. They will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 including a temperature check before and during their stay with you. If personal protective equipment (PPE) is not available, the hospital may not allow a support person or doula to attend the birth. This is to keep patients and staff safe.



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Infants:

If I have COVID-19 during pregnancy, will it hurt my baby?

Based on currently-available information, it is not likely that you will pass on the virus to your baby while you are pregnant or during delivery. After the baby is born, that baby can become infected with COVID-19 if they are exposed to an infected person, the same way adults and older child can become infected. Data on infants with COVID-19 infections is limited, but it currently appears that most infants with COVID-19 have mild or moderate symptoms.

Recently, doctors have reported that a small number of newborns, children, and young adults may have a severe inflammation reaction to the virus. We do not know a lot about this reaction at this time. You are always encouraged to ask your health care provider any specific questions about yourself, your pregnancy, or your baby that you may have.

Can my baby stay with me after I deliver?

Most babies will continue to stay with their parent after delivery. If you have COVID-19 or your healthcare provider thinks you might be infected, the hospital may decide it is best to separate the parent and infant. This decision will be made between you and your healthcare provider.

Breastfeeding:

Note: Additional information about breastfeeding and COVID-19 is available at https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/11/covid-19_breastfeeding_guidance.pdf.

I'm worried about COVID-19 and breastfeeding. Who can I talk to?

Call your health care provider to talk about breastfeeding. If you are in the hospital, you can also ask to talk to a lactation consultant.

Can COVID-19 be passed to my baby from breast milk?

We do not know for sure if COVID-19 can be passed into breast milk, but limited information currently available suggests that it isn't likely to pass to the baby through breast milk.

If I have COVID-19, or might have been exposed to COVID-19, should I breastfeed?

Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for most infants. However, we are still learning about COVID-19, including how it is transmitted. Starting or continuing to breastfeed while infected with COVID-19 is a decision that people should make along with their family and their healthcare provider based on currently available information.

Someone with COVID-19, or someone who has symptoms of infection should take all possible steps to avoid spreading the virus to their infant, including:



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- Washing hands thoroughly before touching the infant; and
- Wearing a face mask or cloth face covering while breast feeding.

People with COVID-19 who choose to express breast milk with a breast pump should:

- Wear a mask or cloth face covering before, during and after pumping milk, and avoid coughing or sneezing on the breast pump collection kit and the milk storage containers.
- Use a breast pump that only you use (a 'dedicated' breast pump).
- Wash your hands before touching any pump or bottle parts, and before expressing breast milk.
- Follow recommendations for proper pump cleaning after each use; and
- If possible, have a caregiver who does not have COVID-19 feed the expressed breast milk to the infant.

If you do not have a breast pump and cannot afford one, you may qualify to receive a free breast pump through Medicaid and/or the Women, Infant, Children (WIC) program. For more information contact your local WIC agency and/or community health worker/home visiting program.

Protecting infants from COVID-19

Should my baby wear a face mask?

No, facemasks or shields are not recommended for newborns, infants or children under 2 years of age. Wearing these could increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) or accidental suffocation.

How do I practice safe sleep habits with my baby during COVID-19?

- Place your baby on his or her back for all sleep times – naps and at night.
- Use a firm, flat sleep surface, such as a mattress in a crib, covered by a fitted sheet.
- Have the baby share your room, but not your bed. Your baby should not sleep on an adult bed, cot, air mattress, or couch, or on a chair alone, with you, or with anyone else.
- Keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads, and soft toys out of your baby's sleep area.
- Do not cover your baby's head or allow your baby to get too hot. Signs your baby may be getting too hot include sweating or if his or her chest feels hot.
- Do not smoke or allow smoking around your baby.

Learn more about [how to reduce the risk of SIDS](#).

Additional Resources on COVID-19 and Pregnancy

Breastfeeding if you have COVID-19:



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<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html#breastfeeding>

COVID-19: What You Need to Know about its Impact on Moms and Babies (March of Dimes):
<https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know.aspx>

Additional breastfeeding resources:

Breast pump cleaning recommendations (CDC):

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/healthychildcare/infantfeeding/breastpump.html>

Breastfeeding and the flu (CDC):

<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/maternal-or-infant-illnesses/influenza.html>

NYSDOH Breastfeeding and COVID-19 Guidance:

https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/11/covid-19_breastfeeding_guidance.pdf

New York State Resources for Pregnant and Parenting Families

If you are pregnant or a new parent and need other supports, please visit the following sites to learn about our free perinatal home visiting programs, available in some areas of the state:

Maternal and Infant Community Health Collaborative:

https://www.health.ny.gov/community/adults/women/docs/michc_by_county.pdf

Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program:

https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/home_visiting_programs/pregnant_parenting_fam.htm#list

Family Planning Program

https://www.health.ny.gov/community/pregnancy/family_planning/program_sites.htm