

Are you Pregnant (or Breastfeeding) and Affected by a Hurricane?

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From images of buildings destroyed by high wind to families stranded on roof tops by flooding (and the rising death toll), to say that hurricanes can be devastating would be an understatement. At MotherToBaby, we receive questions from moms and moms-to-be in storm-affected areas regarding the potential exposures they may be experiencing as powerful forces of nature wreak havoc on their homes and communities. We just wanted to let you know – **MotherToBaby is here for you, your unborn child and your baby.** We can answer your questions about the known facts surrounding these potential natural disaster-related exposures during your pregnancy or while breastfeeding. You can call us toll-free (866-626-6847), text us (855-999-3525), chat with us online or send us an email via [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org). Here are some common questions we're getting and answers to help provide you with as much information as possible during this difficult time:

I'm pregnant and worried about possible things associated with a hurricane that might harm my baby.

Being pregnant can be a stressful time, without having the additional concerns of a natural disaster like a hurricane! However, remember that many pregnant women have been in similar situations and had normal pregnancy outcomes and healthy babies. There are some common sense things you can do to keep you and your baby safe:

- Continue to eat nutritious food...even if it is from a can.
- Drink safe fluids...bottled or boiled water, for example.
- Rest whenever you can and get the proper amount of sleep.
- Don't overdo heavy lifting.

MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on pregnancy during natural disasters:
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/natural-disasters/>

I am worried that there might be industrial chemicals released into the air and water after a hurricane. Will this present a risk to my pregnancy?

Local industry may be affected by heavy rain, wind, tornadoes, and flooding from a hurricane. Various chemicals (carbon monoxide, ammonia, chlorine, hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid) can be released into the air or flood waters from damage to those industrial sites. Local authorities will often notify the public about any chemical spills and explain what the public should do to avoid or reduce exposures (staying indoors, for example). If you think the smell is natural gas, go to a safe area away from the smell and call 911 or the local gas company.

You may want to start taking notes on paper or making some mental notes in case you have questions about how those chemicals might affect your pregnancy or your breastfed baby. Contact your health provider or MotherToBaby and be prepared to answer these questions:

- The names of the chemicals
- New or increased symptoms (vomiting, headache, dizziness, etc.)
- How you came into contact with the chemicals (breathing, touching, in your mouth or eyes, etc.)
- How long you were in contact with the chemicals

Fortunately, exposures like these are often small enough that they don't present a risk to the pregnancy. For example, just smelling something may not result in a significant amount being passed to the baby. However, each chemical is

different, so be sure to ask about any of your concerns.

I'm worried about whether my drinking water is safe...can I get an infection from it that could harm my pregnancy?

Infections are common after a natural disaster. These can include bacterial infections and parasites from dirty water. Many of these infections are important to treat, and you should contact your obstetrical health provider (Midwife or OB) if you think you have an infection. MotherToBaby has fact sheets on common infections and many medications used to treat them: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets-parent/>

All this water is resulting in a lot of mosquitoes! Not only are they unpleasant but can't they spread infections that may harm my pregnancy? Is insect repellent safe to use in pregnancy?

You are correct that mosquitos can sometimes carry serious infections such as Zika and West Nile disease.

MotherToBaby has fact sheets on these diseases and many others:

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/zika-virus-pregnancy/> and

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/west-nile-virus-infection-pregnancy/>.

There are also some things you can do to lower your chances of being bitten by a mosquito:

- Stay indoors with proper screens during peak times of mosquito activity (usually overnight from dusk through dawn)
- Wear long sleeved shirts and pants when outdoors
- Consider using insect repellent containing an effective ingredient such as DEET or picaridin. Apply the repellent sparingly to exposed skin and outer clothing, and wash it off when you are back inside and no longer need it. MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on insect repellents at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/insect-repellents/>

I'm just so stressed out by the whole situation! Our home is destroyed and we are staying in a shelter. I've heard from my grandmother that stress can harm the baby. Is this true?

Pregnant women often worry that stress can affect the pregnancy and cause miscarriage, premature delivery or low birth weight. Fortunately, most experts agree that moderate levels of stress are unlikely to harm the pregnancy. It's still best to keep as calm as possible, and try to quit worrying about worrying! It's normal to feel irritable and out of control, and to be tearful and worried. Stress can make existing medical conditions worse, so it's important that you take care of yourself even as you are taking care of family members:

- Pay attention to your blood sugar levels and blood pressure.
- Do things to relax. Get some exercise, even if it's just a short walk.
- Take deep breaths and think positive thoughts about your baby.

If you feel depressed, talk to someone such as your partner, a relative or friend, or a health care provider. If you have been taking medicine for mental health issues, keep taking it unless your doctor tells you to stop. It's OK to ask for help. Treating depression and anxiety helps your baby. Check out this fact sheet for more information:

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/stress-pregnancy/>

The good news is that my home is still standing. The bad news is that the hurricane has caused a real mess in my home! What types of cleaning agents are safe to use while I am pregnant?

First of all, remember that you don't need to take on everything...you are pregnant after all! Let others do the heavy lifting or handle possibly toxic cleaning chemicals. However, most household cleaning agents are pretty low risk. To help protect yourself and your baby, wear gloves when using cleaning agents and try to keep fresh air moving through your work area (consider a fan and open the windows).

What about mold? Hurricanes involve rain and can cause flooding...and all this water in my house has caused mold in my walls. Will this hurt me or my pregnancy?

After the rain has stopped and flood waters go down, mold may start to grow in damaged homes, cars and businesses.

Whether you are young or older, pregnant or not pregnant, mold exposure can make you sick. However, there is no proof that exposure to mold increases risks for birth defects or pregnancy complications. Companies can help with the cleanup, but you can do some on your own if you take the right precautions. MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on mold: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/mold-pregnancy/>

Here's how to learn about cleaning mold in your home: <https://www.epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-your-home>

If you must live or work in a place where mold is being removed, try to open windows so that your exposure is less to airborne mold spores. If you can sleep somewhere else at night and just return to clean up for a short period each day, that may be best for you.

What if I am breastfeeding my baby? Do I need to worry about exposures or should I use formula?

Breastfeeding is good for you and your baby! It is even more important when there are concerns that the water used to make formula may be contaminated. Be sure to keep yourself well hydrated, and use common sense about your exposures. MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on breastfeeding in a natural disaster: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/breastfeeding-natural-disaster/>

Here is another website to check out:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/emergency/safety-messages.htm>

More about MotherToBaby

MotherToBaby is a service of the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), suggested resources by many agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). If you have questions about exposures resulting from a natural disaster during pregnancy and breastfeeding, please call MotherToBaby toll-FREE at 866-626-6847 or try out MotherToBaby's new text information service by texting questions to (855) 999-3525. You can also visit [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org) to browse a library of fact sheets about dozens of viruses, medications, vaccines, alcohol, diseases, or other exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding. MotherToBaby has been able to embark on new outreach efforts to reach underserved populations and launch new communication technologies through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, as well as through the generous donations made by the public.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org).

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