



MotherToBaby

Medications & More During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding
Ask The Experts

Fact Sheet

by the **Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)**

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Coronaviruses

* Information on COVID-19 is rapidly evolving, and this fact sheet could become outdated by the time you read it. For the most up to date information, please call MotherToBaby at 866-626-6847.

This sheet talks about exposure to coronaviruses in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What are coronaviruses? How do people get them?

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). In late 2019, a novel (new) coronavirus called COVID-19 (previously called 2019-nCoV) was identified in Wuhan, China. It has since spread to other countries, including the United States.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, although some people have only very mild or no symptoms. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and death. SARS and MERS symptoms are similar, with SARS patients also commonly reporting diarrhea and body aches.

Coronaviruses are easily spread by close person-to-person contact. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, the virus can spread to others who are nearby. The best ways to prevent getting a coronavirus are to avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing or sneezing, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces, and wash your hands frequently. Correctly washing hands may be the best way to prevent catching a coronavirus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) posts travel health notices here, and currently recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China.

Can I be tested for coronavirus?

CDC offers testing guidance for COVID-19 here. Although there are no current outbreaks of SARS or MERS, testing is available if required. If you think you may have a coronavirus, contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Can being infected with a coronavirus make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done to see if having a coronavirus could make it harder for a woman to get pregnant.

Does being infected with a coronavirus during pregnancy increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Studies have not been done to see if getting a coronavirus during pregnancy could increase the chance of miscarriage. In a small sample of pregnant women who had SARS in the first trimester, 4 out of 7 pregnancies ended in miscarriage. There is not enough information to know if the miscarriages were caused by the virus, the severity of the mother's illness, or other reasons. More research is needed to know how coronavirus infection could affect a pregnancy.

Does being infected with a coronavirus in the first trimester increase the chance of birth defects?

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. There are no published studies looking at coronavirus infection in pregnancy and birth defects.

A high fever (see MotherToBaby's fact sheet: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/>) in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects. If you get sick with a coronavirus or any other illness and develop a high fever, please speak with your healthcare provider as soon as possible to discuss the best way

to lower it.

Does having a coronavirus in the second or third trimester cause other pregnancy complications?

Among 12 pregnant women with SARS, there were 2 cases of preterm birth (delivery before 37 weeks). In a report of 11 pregnant women with MERS, there were 2 stillbirths and 1 infant who died shortly after a premature delivery. In a recent report of 9 women diagnosed with COVID-19 during the third trimester of pregnancy, none of the infants were born with coronavirus infection. Samples of amniotic fluid, cord blood, and infant throat swabs taken from 6 of the mother-infant pairs did not show signs that the infection had passed from the mothers to their babies before delivery. More information is needed in order to know all the possible effects of coronavirus infection in pregnancy.

Because coronaviruses can cause serious symptoms and even death in pregnant women, prompt treatment is important. If the virus is left untreated, complications in the mother such as pneumonia and kidney failure could cause problems for the developing baby.

Does exposure to a coronavirus in pregnancy cause long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby?

Studies have not been done to see if having a coronavirus in pregnancy could have long-term effects on the child.

Can I breastfeed if I have the coronavirus?

Six women diagnosed with COVID-19 in late pregnancy provided samples of their first breast milk. All 6 milk samples tested negative for the virus. However, more information is needed to know the effects of coronavirus on breast milk. Women who are breastfeeding should talk with their healthcare providers and weigh the known benefits of breastfeeding against the unknown risks of breastfeeding with coronavirus. If you choose to breastfeed while you have a coronavirus, taking precautions such as frequent hand washing and wearing a facemask can limit the chance of passing the virus to the baby.

If a man has a coronavirus, could it affect his fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

This has not been well studied. In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/>.

Please click here to view references.

February, 2020