COVID-19

* Information on COVID-19 is rapidly evolving, and this fact sheet could become outdated by the time you read it.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 having COVID-19 in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

**What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus. This virus (called SARS-CoV-2) belongs to a group called coronaviruses. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include chills with or without shaking, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, and a new loss of taste or smell. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, respiratory failure, and death. Some people have only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all (asymptomatic), but they can still spread the virus to other people.

**How can I help prevent getting COVID-19?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread mostly by close person-to-person contact. When an infected person breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes, the virus can spread to others who are nearby. To help protect yourself and others from infection while the virus is spreading, wear a mask when out in public, avoid close contact with others (stay at least 6 feet apart), avoid gatherings (especially in indoor spaces), wash your hands often, and clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Getting vaccinated is another way to protect yourself from COVID-19. You can read more about COVID-19 vaccines on the MotherToBaby fact sheet at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/covid-19-vaccines/.

For more information on reducing the chance of exposure to the virus at the workplace, please see our fact sheet on Occupational Exposure to COVID-19 at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/occupational-exposure-to-covid-19/.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) share additional information for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html.

**Can I be tested for COVID-19?**

You should be tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19; have had close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19; have taken part in activities that could put you at higher risk for COVID-19, such as travel, large social gatherings, or being in crowded indoor settings; or have been asked by your healthcare provider or public health department to be tested. The CDC offers information about testing for COVID-19 at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html. Your local testing guidelines may be different.

**I have COVID-19. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?**

Based on the data available, it is not known if having COVID-19 could make it harder to get pregnant.

**Does having COVID-19 increase the chance for miscarriage?**

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. The available studies on COVID-19 infections in pregnancy have not suggested an increased chance of miscarriage as compared to the general population. More research is needed to know if having COVID-19 could increase the chance of miscarriage.

**Does having COVID-19 increase the chance of birth defects?**

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Although the research is still limited, the available studies and reports on COVID-19 infections in pregnancy have not reported birth defects related to COVID-19.

Fever is a possible symptom of COVID-19. A high fever in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects (see MotherToBaby’s fact sheet on hyperthermia at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/). If you get sick with COVID-19 or any other illness and...
develop a fever, talk with your healthcare provider as soon as possible about the best way to lower it.

**Does having COVID-19 cause other pregnancy complications?**

There is still limited information about COVID-19 and pregnancy. People who are pregnant and have COVID-19 might have a higher chance of becoming very sick than people who are not pregnant. Recent studies looking at COVID-19 infections among women in the U.S. have found that those who were pregnant had a higher chance of being admitted to intensive care and needing to be put on a ventilator (machine that helps you breathe) than women who were not pregnant.

Having severe symptoms or complications from any illness might increase the chance of pregnancy complications, such as preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks of pregnancy). A recent report looking at COVID-19 infections among pregnant women in the U.S. found a higher than expected number of preterm deliveries following infection in the 2nd or 3rd trimesters. There have been other reports of preterm deliveries among women with COVID-19 in the U.S. and other countries. However, it is not always clear from these reports if the deliveries happened on their own because of the mother’s infection, if the healthcare providers chose to deliver the baby early due to the mother’s worsening symptoms (such as respiratory distress), or if the preterm deliveries were due to other reasons unrelated to COVID-19.

Having COVID-19 can increase the chance of developing blood clots, especially if the infection is severe. A recent study reported that among women giving birth in hospitals, those with COVID-19 had a higher chance of heart attack and blood clots than those women who did not have COVID-19 (even though the overall chance of heart attack or blood clots was still small). The American Society of Hematology recommends that all adults who are hospitalized with COVID-19 be given treatment to prevent blood clots. People who are pregnant and admitted to the hospital with COVID-19 should discuss treatment options with their healthcare providers.

**Can the virus that causes COVID-19 pass to the baby during the pregnancy?**

In reports of infants born to women with COVID-19 around the time of delivery, most newborns have not had evidence of infection. However, a small number of newborns have tested positive for the virus soon after delivery. Although this suggests the possibility that the virus could pass from a person who is pregnant to their baby during pregnancy, researchers need more information in order to confirm this. If the virus can pass to the baby during pregnancy, it appears to be very rare.

**Does having COVID-19 in pregnancy cause long-term problems in learning or behavior for the baby?**

No studies have looked at this question. Based on the available data, it is not known if having COVID-19 in pregnancy causes long-term problems for the baby.

**Can I breastfeed while I have COVID-19?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is unlikely to pass through the breast milk. There have not been any reported cases of infants getting COVID-19 through breast milk. Particles of the virus have been found in a small number of breast milk samples from women with COVID-19, but these particles are not expected to cause infection in babies. In fact, breast milk provides protection against many childhood infections. People are often encouraged to continue breastfeeding or providing breast milk even when they are sick with a virus, such as flu.

People who are breastfeeding while sick with COVID-19 can help prevent passing the virus to their babies through contact by washing their hands frequently and wearing a mask while nursing. They can also consider pumping milk for someone else to feed their baby while they recover. The CDC has information on COVID-19 and breastfeeding at [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html#breastfeeding](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html#breastfeeding). Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

**Can having COVID-19 it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?**

One small study found that men who had moderate cases of COVID-19 (requiring hospital care) had fewer and slower sperm about one month after recovery as compared to men who had only mild cases of COVID-19 or healthy men who did not have COVID-19. There is not enough information to know how often this might happen or if COVID-19 infection could have long-term effects on a man’s fertility. There is no evidence of a higher chance of birth defects if the father or sperm donor has COVID-19. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to
a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting an observational study looking at COVID-19 in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. If you know or suspect you may have COVID-19 and you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972 or sign up at https://mothertobaby.org/join-study/.

Please click here to view references.