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*Information on COVID-19 is rapidly evolving, and this fact sheet could become outdated by the time you read it.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 or 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 a respiratory 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.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is primarily spread by close person-to-person contact. When an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, the virus can spread to others who are nearby. The best ways to protect yourself from infection are to avoid close contact with others (stay at least 6 feet away), wash your hands frequently, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, and clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Staying home as much as possible and avoiding gatherings in indoor spaces when the virus is spreading in the community can also reduce the chance of exposure to the virus. We can all help prevent the spread of the virus and protect ourselves against infection by wearing cloth face coverings when out in public. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) share additional considerations for pregnancy here. You can find the CDC travel health notices here.

Can I be tested for COVID-19?

CDC offers information about testing for COVID-19 here. You should be tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, you have had close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19, or you have been asked by your healthcare provider or public health department to be tested. Your local testing guidelines may vary. You can visit your state or local health department’s website to look for the latest local information on testing.

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. Based on the data available, it is not known if having COVID-19 increases 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. Based on the data available, it is not known if having COVID-19 increases the chance of birth defects above the background risk. At this time there are no reports of babies born with birth defects related to COVID-19.

A high fever in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects (see MotherToBaby’s fact sheet: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/). If you get sick with COVID-19 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 COVID-19 cause 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. A recent study looking at COVID-19 infections among women in the U.S. found that women 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. For this reason, it is especially important for people who are pregnant to take precautions to avoid infection.
and to seek prompt management of any symptoms.

Having severe symptoms or complications from any illness might require people who are pregnant to deliver their babies sooner than expected. Preterm delivery (before 37 weeks) can be associated with long-term health problems for babies. Reports of people hospitalized with symptoms of COVID-19 during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy have included preterm deliveries, but it is not clear if these were due to the infection or other reasons.

**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, and to better understand all the possible effects of COVID-19 in pregnancy.

**Does having COVID-19 in pregnancy cause long-term problems?**

Based on the data available, it is not known if having COVID-19 in pregnancy causes long-term problems.

**I am pregnant and work at a job where I could be exposed to COVID-19. How can I protect myself?**

Please see our fact sheet on Occupational Exposure to COVID-19 for more information.

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

Based on current information, breast milk isn’t likely to spread the virus to babies. 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. There have not been any reported cases of infants getting COVID-19 through breast milk. 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 face covering while nursing. They can also consider pumping milk for someone else to feed their baby while they recover. CDC information on COVID-19 and breastfeeding can be found here. The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine statement on breastfeeding and COVID-19 can be found here. 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?**

This has not been studied. 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/pdf/.

*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.