

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\* Information on COVID-19 is rapidly evolving, and this fact sheet could become outdated by the time you read it.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

## ***What does it mean to have an occupational exposure to COVID-19?***

Certain jobs may put you at higher risk of coming into contact with the virus that causes COVID-19. These include jobs in healthcare settings, schools, grocery or retail stores, public transportation, group settings such as childcare or elder care, and others. For general information about COVID-19 in pregnancy and breastfeeding, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet **COVID-19**. The MotherToBaby fact sheet **Reproductive Hazards of the Workplace: Tips for Job Safety** can also answer additional questions you may have.

## ***What general precautions should I take to protect myself against COVID-19 at work while pregnant or breastfeeding?***

People who are pregnant or breastfeeding should take the same general precautions at work to protect against COVID-19 as people who are not pregnant, including wearing an appropriate mask or face covering, washing hands frequently, and avoiding touching the eyes, nose, and mouth. Maintaining 6 feet of separation from patients/customers/coworkers (social distancing) is recommended whenever possible. If distancing is not possible, talk with your employer about other strategies such as installing physical barriers (like plexiglass) to separate you from others or relocating your workspace to an area with better ventilation. Letting your employer know as soon as possible that you are pregnant may allow them to make changes to your work duties to limit your close interactions with others.

## ***I am a healthcare worker who is pregnant. What else do I need to know about protecting myself?***

Be sure your employer knows you are pregnant before you provide any direct patient care to a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. When possible, and depending on staffing, management should consider limiting your exposure to these patients. This is especially true if you perform procedures with a higher chance of coming into contact with a patient's respiratory droplets.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that all healthcare providers follow both **standard** and **transmission-based** precautions when working with all patients. Recommended **personal protective equipment (PPE)** for lower risk procedures includes the use of a facemask and eye protection. **Aerosol generating procedures** (such as intubation) or certain **surgical procedures** pose a higher risk for transmission should the patient have COVID-19. Recommended PPE for this type of encounter includes a N95 respirator (or a facemask if respirators are unavailable), gown, gloves, and eye protection. For more information, see **Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic**.

## ***I work in a school and I am pregnant. Are there special considerations for me?***

If possible, consider teaching or working virtually from home to reduce your chances of exposure. If you do need to work at school, enforce social distancing and the consistent use of face coverings in your classroom

or other work area. Encourage students and coworkers to stay home and be tested if they are sick or have recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19. **Clean and disinfect** your classroom or other workspace as directed by the CDC. If weather allows, increase ventilation in indoor spaces by opening windows and doors and **correctly using fans** to draw more fresh air into the room. Consider holding classes outdoors when weather allows.

Other specific safety precautions you can take may vary depending on your job at the school (teacher, office staff, janitorial or maintenance staff, coaching staff, etc.). For more information, see **Strategies for Protecting K-12 School Staff from COVID-19**.

## ***I work in a grocery store and I am pregnant. How can I best protect myself?***

Support and help enforce the use of facial coverings and social distancing by all customers and employees. Regularly **clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces and objects in your workspace such as counters, cash registers, card readers, and telephones. Avoid using other employees' registers or work spaces, if possible, or clean and disinfect them before and after use. Talk to your employer about possible shift changes that would allow you to work during less busy times, in order to limit your contact with the public. For more information, see [What Grocery and Food Retail Workers Need to Know about COVID-19](#).

***I am pregnant and I drive a public bus. What special precautions should I take?***

Encourage and help enforce the use of facial coverings and social distancing by all passengers, including asking them to stay behind any sneeze guards, colored lines, or other barriers. Be sure your driving area is **cleaned and disinfected** before and after your shift. Talk to your employer about possible shift changes that would allow you to work during less busy times, in order to limit your contact with the public. For more information, see [What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know about COVID-19](#).

***I work in a childcare facility and I am pregnant. Are there special considerations for my job?***

Model good practices such as correctly wearing a face covering, **washing hands correctly and often**, covering coughs and sneezes, practicing social distancing, and staying home when sick. Help children and parents learn and use these practices as well (masks should not be put on children under the age of two). Help ensure that surfaces are **cleaned and disinfected** regularly, per CDC guidelines. Consider talking to your employer about limiting your exposure to parents and guardians during drop-off and pick-up times, or scheduling your shifts around these busy times. For more information, see [Guidance for Child Care Programs](#).

***Where can I find information about other jobs with a higher chance of coming into contact with the virus?***

The CDC offers guidance for many other jobs at this link: [Worker Safety and Support](#).

***Should I be concerned about being around disinfectant products while pregnant?***

When you use cleaning and disinfecting products as directed, the amount of chemical that might enter your blood, cross the placenta, and reach the developing baby is low and not expected to increase pregnancy risks. You can further minimize your exposure by wearing a mask and gloves, opening windows to get fresh air, and not eating/drinking while cleaning. If you are not present when the chemicals are being used (for example, a coworker applies them or the workplace is fogged overnight), then your exposure will be less. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby blog [What's the Dirt on Household Cleaners When Pregnant?](#) If you have questions about a particular chemical or your exact workplace scenario, please contact MotherToBaby to speak with a specialist.

***Do I need to be tested for COVID-19 if I work at a job that has a higher chance of infection?***

The CDC has guidance for testing health care providers [here](#). If you test positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, you should stay home from work and follow the CDC's [return to work guidelines](#) to determine when to come back. For other jobs, you should follow [standard testing guidelines](#) and/or check with your employer to determine if they have additional testing recommendations in place.

*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/>.*

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

Disclaimer: MotherToBaby Fact Sheets are meant for general information purposes and should not replace the advice of your health care provider. MotherToBaby is a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). Copyright by OTIS, October 16, 2020.