

COVID-19 and Pregnancy, Birth, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding

Information for Expectant and New Parents

The information below is current as of March 23, 2020. COVID-19 is a new virus so information is continually being reviewed and updated. The messages below may change as our knowledge of COVID-19 evolves.

Where can I find trusted, up-to-date information on COVID-19?

Visit ahs.ca/covid or alberta.ca/covid for trusted, Alberta-specific information about COVID-19.

A podcast featuring Dr. Colin Birch, Department Head of Obstetrics and Gynecology for Calgary Zone, with questions about the impact of COVID-19 on expectant mothers and families of newborns is available at ahs.ca/covidpodcast

I am an expectant or new parent, is there anything I can do to avoid getting infected with COVID-19?

It is always important for expectant parents, new parents, and breastfeeding families to protect themselves from illness and to take steps to avoid and prevent any infection. Learn more at HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The following steps can help to reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 infection or having it spread to others:

Proper hygiene:

- Stay home and away from others if you are sick.
- [Wash your hands often](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, not into your hand. Dispose of tissues as soon as possible and wash your hands afterward.
- Avoid touching your eyes, face, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- [Clean and disinfect surfaces](#) that are touched frequently (e.g., door handles, phones, television remotes, toilets, bedside tables).

[Social distancing](#) (taking steps to limit the number of people you or your baby come into close contact with):

- Keep a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet, or about the length of a bicycle) from others.
- Limit the number of times you leave your home for errands. Consider ordering online or having items delivered if possible.
- If you need to go out for groceries, medical trips, or other essential needs, try to go out at less busy times.
- Work from home if possible.

- Maintain distance (at least 2 metres, or 6 feet) when you go for walks in your neighbourhood or park.
- Avoid social gatherings.
- Avoid overcrowding in places like elevators.
- Stay in virtual contact with family and friends. If you are feeling isolated, reach out.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick or have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, other cold or flu-like symptoms).

Pregnancy (prenatal)

I am pregnant and I am worried about getting infected with COVID-19. How will COVID-19 affect me and my baby?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that being pregnant increases your risk of getting COVID-19. People who are pregnant are currently considered to have the same risk of getting COVID-19 as other adults.

COVID-19 does not seem to cross the placental barrier and there is currently no evidence that the virus is transmitted to your baby during pregnancy, delivery or through breastmilk.

If you are pregnant and have a suspected or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, the course of your illness during pregnancy should not be any different than a typical, healthy, non-pregnant person. There is currently no evidence to suggest that a pregnant person is at a greater risk for more serious complications related to COVID-19.

However, as with any significant maternal illness, there is always an increased risk of preterm or stillbirth. Talk to your health care provider if you have any [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or test results if you have them, or other respiratory illness.

If I think I already have the COVID-19 infection, what should I do?

If you aren't feeling well, complete the [COVID 19 online screening tool](#) that is available at ahs.ca/covid.

Notify your health care provider of your concerns, as they may need to make different arrangements for your clinic appointments and prenatal care.

I'm pregnant and feeling healthy. Should I still go to my prenatal appointments?

Different clinics and offices may have implemented different procedures and policies at this time. Talk to your physician or midwife about your upcoming prenatal appointments. If you are worried about leaving your home to attend an appointment, talk to your health care provider.

Labour and birth (intrapartum)

At this time, Alberta Health Services has taken steps to restrict visitors to hospitals. These restrictions also apply to your labour support person. [Learn more here](#).

What will happen when I am in labour during the COVID-19 pandemic?

If you do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 and are not on self-isolation, labour and delivery can occur at your hospital or in your home as previously planned with your health care provider. Visit [HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca for information on labour and birth](https://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/parents/healthy-children/parents-children/parents-children-2020-05-14.aspx).

If you are on self-isolation and not experiencing any symptoms, your labour and delivery can occur at the hospital or in your home as previously planned. However, your health care provider, your support person, and any relevant hospital staff will wear protective equipment that includes a gown, mask with eye protection, and gloves. As there are restrictions on the visitors allowed that also include support persons, your health care provider will ask your support person screening questions either when arriving at the hospital or before entering your home.

If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have tested positive, your health care provider will recommend that labour and delivery occur in a hospital. Your health care provider will still be able to attend your labour and delivery. Your health care provider, your support person, and any relevant hospital staff will wear protective equipment.

Postpartum

What will happen when I am discharged from the hospital?

If possible, you and your baby may be discharged early from hospital. A public health nurse or your midwife will contact you to check on you and discuss the need for further follow up.

A public health nurse, physician or your midwife will continue your postpartum care in the community. You should continue to practice good hand hygiene and social distancing. Continue to practice [self-isolation](#), if needed.

If I am experiencing symptoms, have been tested positive for COVID-19, or need to self-isolate, can I still have [skin-to-skin contact](#) with my baby after delivery?

Yes, you can. Your health care provider will show you how to wash your hands and chest and wear a mask to protect your baby. You can continue this practice to keep your baby safe until you are feeling better. Feeling better means that all of your symptoms have resolved or 10 days has passed since the start of symptoms, whichever is longer.

Breastfeeding

If I have COVID-19, will I still be able to breastfeed and provide care to my baby?

Based on current evidence, COVID-19 is not transmitted through breastmilk. The [benefits of breastfeeding](#) contribute to the overall health of your baby and breastfeeding continues to be recommended.

The transmission of the COVID-19 virus occurs from respiratory droplets that can be spread from breathing, coughing, sneezing, or direct contact. If you have COVID-19 or symptoms of a respiratory illness, the following measures will help protect your baby from getting the infection:

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your baby.
- Avoid coughing or sneezing on your baby while breastfeeding or feeding by bottle.
- If possible, wear a face mask while breastfeeding your baby. If you don't have a face mask, see below.
- Wash your chest before breastfeeding.
- If you are expressing breastmilk with a pump, wash your hands before touching the pump, bottle, and other feeding equipment. Clean the equipment thoroughly after each use.
- Clean high-touch surfaces like feeding equipment and change pads often.

If you are using a face mask while feeding or caring for your baby, wash your hands with soap and water before putting on the mask. Do not touch the mask while using it, replace the mask if it gets damp or dirty, and do not reuse single-use masks. If you accidentally touch the mask while you are using it, wash your hands. Wash your hands after removing the mask.

If you do not have a face mask, alternatives can reduce some droplets from coughing or sneezing. Wrap a two-layer cloth like a scarf or bandana around your nose and mouth while feeding your baby. If you are using an alternative mask, wash your hands before covering your nose and mouth, do not touch the covering, and use it when feeding or caring for your baby. Replace the alternative mask if it gets wet and wash it thoroughly after each use. Alternatives are not as effective as face masks.

If you are not feeling well and are feeding by bottle, consider having someone who is feeling well feed your baby.

It is okay to care for your baby. However, when not providing direct care, keep your baby at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from anyone who is sick, may have COVID-19, or who has a respiratory illness.

The same steps that you were taking to reduce the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19 while you were pregnant (proper hygiene and social distancing, see above) will reduce the risk of your baby getting COVID-19.

Where can I find more information about pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, postpartum supports, and caring for my new baby?

Contact your local community or public health centre for information on prenatal classes or take the [online Birth and Babies course](#). You can also refer to Alberta Health Services' pregnancy and parenting resource [HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca](https://www.alberta.ca/healthy-parents-healthy-children) for information on pregnancy, breastfeeding, and the early years.

If you are pregnant or caring for a newborn, take care of yourself. Take breaks from watching or listening to pandemic information. Connect virtually with others in similar situations and talk about how you are feeling. Know that you are not alone. Find supports at: [ahs.ca/HelpInToughTimes](https://www.alberta.ca/help-in-tough-times)