

Information for Pregnant Women and Their Families

CORONA VIRUS & PREGNANCY

How is the virus spread?

The virus is carried by droplets which are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also be passed on if you touch a surface which has been contaminated by an infected person.

The most effective way of protecting yourself against catching this virus is by washing your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water; not touching your face; avoiding large groups of people; and, keeping a distance of a meter or more between yourself and others.

Building up your immune system by eating well and getting enough rest is important to prevent you from contracting the disease.

Am I more likely to get the virus because I'm pregnant?

In general, pregnant women are more susceptible to infections than women who are not pregnant. While there is still much to learn about this new virus, there is currently no evidence to suggest that pregnant women are at higher risk of becoming infected with coronavirus than the general population.

If you do contract the disease, it is most likely that you will only experience mild to moderate flu like symptoms. These include: sore throat; fatigue; dry cough and a mild fever. However, if you suffer from an underlying condition such as asthma or diabetes, contracting coronavirus may make you feel more unwell.

More severe symptoms, like pneumonia are more common in people who have weaker immune systems and older people.

What about my baby?

For pregnant women who are infected with coronavirus, it seems that there is no increased risk of miscarriage or having a baby with abnormalities. At the moment, there is also no evidence to suggest that a pregnant woman can pass on the virus to her unborn baby. While there MAY be a higher risk of your baby being born prematurely, the research on this is not yet conclusive.

Can I breastfeed?

Yes. There is currently no evidence that the virus can be passed on through breastmilk. However, since the virus is passed on through respiratory droplets, it is important that you wash your hands before breastfeeding and that you consider wearing a mask, if you have one. Avoid coughing or sneezing while you are breastfeeding your baby.

If you are using a breast pump to express breast milk, make sure that you wash your hands before touching the pump or the bottles and that you sterilise the bottles and pump after use. Where possible, use a dedicated breast pump if you are expressing breast milk in hospital.

If you are using formula to feed your baby, ensure that bottles are sterilised.

How can I protect myself against becoming infected with coronavirus?

Personal hygiene, especially handwashing is the most effective way of preventing infection. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol gel where there is no soap and water. Try to ensure that there is always 1.5m of physical distance between you and the next person to avoid breathing in any respiratory droplets. Try to avoid closed or crowded spaces where there is limited airflow. Drinking enough fluids, eating a healthy diet and getting enough rest will you're your immunity against infection.

Should I attend my antenatal and postnatal appointments?

Antenatal and postnatal visits are important for you and your baby.

If you have no symptoms and have had no known contact with an infected person, then you should attend your antenatal or postnatal appointments as usual.

If you think you may have become infected with the virus or have symptoms, then you should postpone your visits until after your period of isolation. Contact your doctor or your health facility if you have a scan booked and you think you may be infected with the virus.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to the virus or may have it?

If you think you have been in contact with the virus or suspect that you may have it, it is important that you do not simply visit your doctor's rooms as this may spread the infection.

you should call your doctor or the COVID-19 helpline on 0800 029 999 and tell them of your symptoms, your travel history and your contact with someone who has been infected with the virus.

If you develop a continuous cough or a high temperature you should call your doctor or the COVID-19 hotline to tell them that you think you may have become infected with the virus. They will provide advice on whether you should be tested or whether you should be evaluated. You should also self-isolate for seven days.

Can I still go to work?

Since coronavirus is extremely contagious, it is advisable to work from home if possible. If your job or other factors prevent you from working from home, you should discuss with your employer ways in which exposure to the virus can be limited.

Can I travel?

Unless it is essential, travel should be avoided. If you must travel, then ensure that you have adequate insurance to cover you should you give birth to your baby while you're away.

How are the tests for coronavirus conducted?

Tests for pregnant women are the same as for any other person. Currently, the test for coronavirus involves a swab being taken from your mouth and nose. You may also be required to cough up sputum, which will be tested.

What if I test positive?

If you have tested positive, you should inform your doctor or health facility. If your symptoms are mild or if you have no symptoms, you will be advised to stay at home to recover. If your symptoms are severe, you may have to be treated in hospital.

When should I self-isolate?

If you develop symptoms such as a high temperature or a new continuous cough or if you have been advised to recover at home after testing positive for coronavirus.

What does self-isolation mean?

If you have been advised to self-isolate, you should avoid contact with others for seven days.

Self-isolation includes;

- Not going to work or public places
- Not using public transport
- Ensuring that there is good airflow in your room
- Separating yourself from other members of your household and using separate crockery, cutlery, towels etc.
- Eating at different times from others in the household
- Trying to avoid the need for others to be in your room
- Trying to keep active by exercising

Should I attend my antenatal visits if I am self-isolating?

If you are in self-isolation, it is most likely that your routine visits will be delayed until the self-isolation period is over. You should contact your doctor or health facility to let them know that you are in self-isolation and get their advice on how and when to proceed with antenatal visits

What should I do if I am worried about my baby during self-isolation?

To avoid the risk of infecting others, it is not advisable to visit your doctor or health facility.

Unless the matter is urgent, you should call your doctor or health facility for advice.

If you are advised to go to hospital, then you should inform the hospital prior to admission that you have tested positive for the virus or suspect that you may be infected with the virus.

How will my confirmed or suspected coronavirus infection affect where I give birth?

Once you have informed your doctor or health facility of your suspected or confirmed infection, you may be advised to give birth in an obstetric unit where your baby can be monitored regularly. Since these monitors are only available in an obstetric unit in a hospital, homebirths or births where only a midwife is present, are not advised.

How will my confirmed or suspected coronavirus infection affect how I give birth?

Your coronavirus status should not affect how you give birth, so you should stick to your birth plan as far as possible. A caesarean section may be necessary if respiratory complication occur.

Options for pain relief will be discussed with you early on during labour. Currently, there is no evidence against using methods such as epidurals or spinal blocks to relieve pain. However, the use of Etonox (gas and air) may cause the virus to spread.

What if I go into labour during self-isolation?

You should call your doctor, health facility or the COVID-19 hotline to inform them that you have a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus and have gone into labour. They will provide advice on how to proceed.

If you have mild symptoms, you will no doubt be encouraged to remain at home (self-isolating) in early labour, as per standard practice.

What care will I receive once I have recovered?

To ensure that your baby is well, you will most probably have an ultrasound scan two weeks after your recovery.

Once you have recovered from the coronavirus infection, when and how you give birth will not be affected by your previous illness.

Will my baby be tested for coronavirus?

Yes, if you have suspected or confirmed coronavirus at the time of your baby's birth,

Will I be able to touch my baby if I have suspected or confirmed coronavirus?

If your baby is well and doesn't require neonatal care, then it is likely that your baby will be handed to you after giving birth and will be able to stay with you while you're in hospital.

Your doctor or health care worker may discuss with you the risks and benefits associated with this.

What if I am a health care worker and I am pregnant?

Currently, there is no evidence to show that pregnant women are more susceptible to the virus. However, if you become unwell, it is possible that there are some risks which include foetal growth restriction and premature birth.

You are advised to discuss this with your superior.