

COVID-19: Pregnancy, Birthing and Bringing Baby Home

Being pregnant during the COVID-19 pandemic can feel stressful, and it is natural to worry. Information about COVID-19 and pregnancy is new and changing. Here is what we know now:

- According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there is currently no evidence that pregnant people are at greater risk of becoming very sick from COVID-19.
- To date, there is no evidence that a pregnant person with COVID-19 can pass the infection to her baby during the pregnancy or at delivery. The virus has not been found in samples of amniotic fluid or breastmilk.
- Like everyone else, pregnant people need to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19 and call their health-care provider if they develop symptoms.

Pregnancy

What can I do to protect myself against COVID-19?

Pregnant people should take the same precautions as everyone else to prevent COVID-19 infection. Here's what you can do:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (check the label for Do Not Use in Pregnancy, as some products have a stronger alcohol ingredient).
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.
- Practice physical (social) distancing and when not possible, wear a non-medical mask.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Stay at home except for essential trips (groceries, pharmacy, medical/prenatal appointments).
- Limit travel to essential trips only, even within Manitoba.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms can range from mild (e.g., fever, cough, runny nose and sore throat) to severe (e.g., shortness of breath and difficulty breathing).

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you are pregnant and develop fever, cough, shortness of breath or weakness, you should call your health-care provider or Health Links–Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257. You can also use the COVID-19 online assessment tool

<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>

Should I go to my prenatal and postpartum (after delivery) appointments?

Pregnant people and people who have recently delivered should go to their regular appointments with their health-care provider. Check with your doctor, nurse or midwife before your appointment as some appointments may be by phone rather than in person

Birthing

What can I expect at the hospital for labour and delivery?

Manitoba hospitals are currently limiting visitors to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Maternity patients, may identify two designated support persons. Both support persons may be present during labour and delivery and one may be able to stay overnight. Following the birth of the baby, visits from two designated support persons are permitted. Both may visit at the same time.

You and your support person will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure at the hospital entrance. The screening questions include asking about: COVID-19 symptoms and possible or known COVID-19 exposure. Although you may not have symptoms, you, like all other people being admitted to the hospital, will be offered testing as part of COVID-19 surveillance.

- If the hospital staff are concerned that you have symptoms of COVID-19 or possible COVID-19 exposure, you will be placed in a separate room.
- If the screening shows your support person has symptoms of COVID-19 or possible COVID-19 exposure, they will not be able to enter the hospital with you.

Hospital staff will be wearing protective equipment (gowns, masks, gloves and eye protection) when caring for patients.

Your baby will stay in a bassinet in your room, even if you have COVID-19, unless you are too unwell to care for your baby.

If I have COVID-19 do I need to have a caesarean section?

No. A caesarean section is only done when medically necessary.

Can I hold baby skin-to-skin, breastfeed, bottle-feed if I have COVID-19?

Yes, you can hold baby skin-to-skin, breastfeed or bottle feed your baby if you have or might have COVID-19. To keep your baby safe:

- Wash your hands before and after touching your baby.
- Wear a face mask.
- Wash your chest and breasts before holding baby skin-to-skin and breastfeeding or bottle-feeding.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue instead of your arm and clean your hands. This will help keep your arms and sleeves clean for holding and feeding your baby. If you have coughed or sneezed into your arm or sleeve, wash your arm or change your clothes before handling your baby.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces you have touched regularly.

What can I do if I feel too unwell with COVID-19 to feed my baby?

If you are too unwell to feed your baby, your support person or hospital staff can help you feed your baby. Hospital staff can help you hand express or pump breast milk and they will store it for you. Once you go home, you can ask your public health nurse or health care provider or call the Breastfeeding Hotline if you have more questions about feeding your baby.

Breastfeeding information is available. Call 204-788-8667 (in Winnipeg) or toll free 1-888-315-9257 (outside Winnipeg) and press 2 for health concerns.

Bringing Baby Home

Once I go home what can I do to keep my family and baby safe from COVID-19?

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (check the label for Do Not Use in Pregnancy as some products have a stronger alcohol ingredient).
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.
- Practice physical (social) distancing in public and when not possible, wear a non-medical mask (do not put a mask on your baby or any child under the age of two).
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Your baby should sleep in the same room as you to help establish bonding and breastfeeding. Baby should be placed to sleep on their back in a bassinet or crib for every sleep. No loose blankets, bumper pads, toys or pillows should be in the crib or bassinet. For more information on Safe Sleep see, <https://healthyparentingwinnipeg.ca/safe-sleep-and-your-baby/>.
- If you have COVID-19, your baby should sleep in a crib or bassinet placed at least two metres (six feet) away from your bed. Baby should not sleep in the same room as anyone else who is sick (cough, sneezing, fever). This will help protect your baby from getting sick. Keep the room door open or open the window slightly, as the weather allows, and turn on a fan to promote good airflow.
- It is best to limit visitors. If you do have visitors, make sure they wash their hands once they enter your home and practice physical distancing. You can also consider virtual or window visits.