

COVID-19 and Pregnancy, Birth, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding: Information for Expectant and New Parents

Messaging is continually being reviewed and updated. The messages below may change as our knowledge of COVID-19 evolves.

1. 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.

In addition, 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

2. 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 or treatment for COVID-19 and the public health measures currently recommended are the only interventions we have to reduce the transmission of 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).

[Physical 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,) from others. This includes, for example, when you go for walks in your neighbourhood or park, in your workplace, when you go out for groceries or medical trips, etc.
- Limit the number of times you leave your home for errands. Consider ordering online or having items delivered, if possible, and maintain 2 metres distance from others.
- 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.

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- Avoid social gatherings.
- Avoid overcrowding in places like elevators - limit to 2-3 people.
- Stay in virtual contact with family and friends. If you are feeling isolated, reach out.
- Avoid close contact with people who have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or runny nose) or are sick with other cold or flu-like symptoms.

Pregnancy (prenatal)

3. 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.

There is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted to your baby during pregnancy, delivery or through breastmilk.

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 questions about COVID-19 [symptoms or if you were tested about your COVID-19](#) test results.

4. 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.

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

Clinics and offices may have implemented different procedures and policies at this time to reduce risks of COVID-19. 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](#).

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

You currently are allowed to have one designated support person with you for your labour and delivery.

If you do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 and are not in 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.

If you are in isolation and not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms:

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, eye protection, and gloves.

Your support person will also be asked COVID-19 screening questions.

If you are in mandatory isolation because 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.

What if any of my household members are symptomatic, in isolation or tested positive for COVID-19?

We recognize that family-centered care is very important, however, in the interests of safety individuals who are symptomatic or positive for COVID-19 or who are completing their isolation period will not be permitted into the hospital.

Postpartum

7. What will happen when I am discharged from the hospital?

You and your baby will be discharged as soon as possible from the hospital. A public health nurse or your midwife will be in contact to check on you and discuss the need for further follow up.

A public health nurse or your midwife will continue your postpartum care in the community. Your physician and your baby's physician will continue to care, however, this might look different depending on where you live.

You should continue to practice good hand hygiene and physical distancing. Continue to practice [isolation or mandatory isolation](#) as required.

8. If I am experiencing symptoms, have been tested positive for COVID-19, or need to 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

9. 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 through person to person spread by larger droplets, like from a cough or sneeze, or touching contaminated objects or surfaces, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth..

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.
- 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 with a recommended cleaner – [list of hard surface disinfectants](#).

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.

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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 physical/social distancing, see above) will reduce the risk of your baby getting COVID-19.

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

Prenatal classes have been suspended to protect Albertans and prevent the spread of COVID-19. To find out more about how individual classes are affected contact your local community or public health centre. An online prenatal class option is available - [online Birth and Babies course](#). You can also refer to Alberta Health Services' pregnancy and parenting resource [HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca](#) 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 COVID-19 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](#)