

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.

Having a baby is a joyful, momentous time in your life. COVID-19 doesn't change that, but it may have changed your plans, your ability to connect with family and friends, and your experience of pregnancy and first few months with your baby. Pay attention to your feelings and talk to your partner or someone you trust about them. To learn more about what you can do for yourself in tough times like these and where to get help, visit ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes

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. Frequently asked questions for the public can be found [here](#).

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 reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 infection or spreading 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 your hands are not visibly dirty and 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).

Information for Expectant and New Parents: COVID-19 | 2

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.
- Follow [Alberta's recommendations](#) on 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.

To learn more about how to help prevent the spread, see alberta.ca/prevent-the-spread

3. I am an expectant or new parent, should I wear a non-medical mask to avoid being infected with COVID-19?

[Wearing a non-medical mask](#), such as a homemade cloth mask, has not been proven to protect the person wearing it and is not a substitute for handwashing and physical distancing. However, wearing a non-medical mask may be helpful in protecting others around you. This is because face coverings are another way to cover your mouth and nose to prevent respiratory droplets from contaminating other people or surfaces. Additionally, wearing a mask may stop you from touching your nose and mouth, and may be useful for short periods of time when physical distancing is not possible in public settings such as when grocery shopping or using public transit.

If you have COVID-19 or are feeling unwell, wear a mask while providing direct care to your infant. When not providing direct care, keep your baby at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from you and from anyone who is sick, may have COVID-19, or who has a respiratory illness.

If you choose to wear a non-medical mask or face covering due to illness, there are [steps](#) that you must follow to ensure that you are using it correctly.

If you are using a face mask:

- Ensure that it fits well and does not gape at the sides. Wash your hands with soap and water before putting on the mask **and** after removing the mask.
- Do not touch the mask while using it. If you accidentally touch the mask while you are using it, wash your hands.
- Replace the mask if it gets damp or dirty.

Information for Expectant and New Parents: COVID-19 | 3

- Do not reuse single-use masks.
- Do not share masks with others.
- Used masks must be carefully handled to avoid spreading infection to others.
- It may be helpful to carry a bag with a clean mask in it, as well as a plastic bag that can be used to safely store used masks until they can be washed at home (if using cloth masks) or thrown away (if using disposal masks). Wash reusable cloth masks after each use to avoid infection. They can be laundered with other items using a hot cycle and then dried thoroughly.

Learn more about masks at ahs.ca/covid

4. I am an expectant or new parent, how can I protect myself and baby if any of my household members are symptomatic, in isolation or tested positive for COVID-19?

You can help protect yourself and your baby by:

- Follow all proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and social/physical distancing recommendations.
- If at all possible, try to ensure that the ill person has a designated bedroom and bathroom.
- Do not allow the ill person to prepare meals for others, and ensure that they use separate preparation area or at least prepares meals at a different time, washing all surfaces after.
- Avoid sharing household items like dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels and pillows.
- Monitor yourself for symptoms and call Health Link at 811 for assessment and advice if you have symptoms yourself.
- If you are caring for a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, [follow this advice](#) to protect yourself and others in the home, as well as those in your community.

5. Will my physician know if I'm being tested for COVID-19 or have a positive test result?

If you are being tested for COVID-19 during your pregnancy or after the birth of your baby at an AHS facility or assessment centre, the nurse will ask you to provide the name of your physician. Your physician's name will be added to the lab requisition to ensure a copy of your results are sent to them – they will also need your physician's office address.

You are also asked to contact your physician or specialist if you test positive for COVID-19. If you are being tested for COVID-19 by your physician, they will receive the lab results directly.

For more information for people tested for COVID-19 visit [tested and next steps](#)

Information for Expectant and New Parents: COVID-19 | 4

For more information on how to safely care for your baby if you are experiencing symptoms, have COVID-19 or need to self-isolate see *Postpartum*, *Feeding my Baby* and *Caring for my Baby* sections below).

Pregnancy (prenatal)

6. 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.

Evidence is unclear whether the COVID-19 virus is transmitted to your baby during pregnancy or delivery. There is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted to your baby 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 for COVID-19 or have test results.

7. 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.

If you are currently self-isolating due to travel, symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test and if your symptoms change or worsen, do not delay accessing healthcare. Call Health Link at 811 if you have questions regarding your or your baby's health or call 911 if your symptoms are severe.

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

Clinics and offices may have 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)

9. Can my support person still be with me during labour and birth? Can my family and friends visit me and my baby at the hospital? [UPDATED]

For more information, contact eyhp@ahs.ca

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Information for Expectant and New Parents: COVID-19 | 5

We recognize family centred care is important. At this time, Alberta Health Services has taken steps to restrict visitors to hospitals to ensure safety of families and staff. These restrictions also apply to your labour support person. [Learn more here.](#)

Let the health care provider know when you arrive at the hospital for labour and delivery if there is a person with COVID-19 or with COVID-19 symptoms in your household. All support persons must be healthy, without any COVID-19 symptoms, and not required to be in isolation or quarantine.

10. What will happen when I am in labour during the COVID-19 pandemic? [UPDATED]

Information on who you can bring as your designated support person with you for your labour and delivery is available [here](#).

People living in Alberta are legally required to self-isolate if any of the following apply:

- You have returned from travel outside of Canada within the past 14 days or have been in close contact with a known COVID-19 case;
- You have symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or runny nose; or
- You have tested positive for COVID-19

Exceptions are in place for persons requiring critical medical care, such as delivering a baby, but precautions must be taken.

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.

You and your support person will be asked to fill out COVID-19 screening questions. Support persons who meet the following criteria should not come to the hospital. The support person:

- has symptoms of COVID-19
- has tested positive for COVID-19 and currently in mandatory isolation
- is quarantined because they have returned from travel outside of Canada within the past 14 days
- is a close contact of a person with COVID-19

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.

Postpartum

11. 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 provide 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.

12. 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 – wash your chest if you have been sneezing, coughing or if it has been exposed to droplets from your nose/mouth from talking loudly or singing, and wear a mask to protect your baby. You can continue this practice to keep your baby safe until all of your symptoms have resolved or 10 days has passed since the start of symptoms, whichever is longer. For more information on how to wash your chest, see #15 below.

If you plan to breastfeed, you will also be encouraged to breastfeed during your first skin-to-skin cuddle after delivery.

Feeding my baby

General feeding information

13. How can I feed my baby safely during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Like many other respiratory illnesses, 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, face, nose or mouth.

Continue to practice good hygiene during feeding to help protect your baby from getting the infection:

Information for Expectant and New Parents: COVID-19 | 7

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your baby.
- If wearing a mask, wash your hands before putting your mask on and after removing your mask.
- Avoid coughing or sneezing on your baby while feeding your baby.
- Wash your hands before touching breast pumps, bottles, and other feeding equipment.
- Clean the equipment thoroughly after each use.
- Clean high-touch surfaces like door handles and change pads often with a recommended cleaner – [list of hard surface disinfectants](#).

If you have been tested positive for COVID-19, are isolating, or are feeling unwell, see the breastfeeding and feeding by bottle sections below for more information.

14. Should I wear a mask while feeding my baby?

If you have been tested positive for COVID-19 or are feeling unwell, wear a face mask while feeding your baby and while handling expressed breastmilk, formula, and feeding equipment.

If you are using a face mask while feeding:

- Ensure that it fits well and does not gape at the sides.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before putting on the mask and after removing the mask.
- Do not touch the mask while using it. If you accidentally touch the mask while you are using it, wash your hands.
- Replace the mask if it gets damp or dirty.
- Do not reuse single-use masks.
- Do not share masks with others.

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. Wash your hands if you have touched your mask and after you remove it. Cloth masks should be worn only a short time before being replaced or washed. Replace the alternative mask if it gets wet and wash it thoroughly after each use.

Learn more about masks at ahs.ca/covid

Breastfeeding

15. If I have COVID-19 and still need to isolate due to symptoms or illness, will I still be able to breastfeed and express breastmilk for my baby? [UPDATED]

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

Continue to practice good hygiene (see above) to help protect your baby. In addition:

- Wash your chest with soap and water before breastfeeding if you have been sneezing, coughing or if it has been exposed to droplets from your nose/mouth from talking loudly or singing.
- Clean your chest area with water and a mild unscented soap, then rinse twice with clear water to remove the soap residue. This can be done in the shower or wiping with a clean wet soft cloth. Put some of your expressed breastmilk on your nipples and areolas before and after feeding to keep them healthy and prevent them from drying. There is no need to use a disinfectant or antibacterial soap.
- Wear a face mask while feeding your baby and while handling expressed breastmilk and feeding equipment.
- Consider putting a scarf or blanket over your shoulder to cover your baby while you feed.

You can continue this practice to keep your baby safe until all of your symptoms have resolved or 10 days has passed since the start of symptoms, whichever is longer.

Feeding by bottle

16. If I have COVID-19, will I still be able to feed my baby by bottle?

If you are feeding by bottle, continue to practice good hygiene and [clean feeding equipment](#) regularly (see above) to help protect your baby.

Wear a face mask while feeding your baby and while handling expressed breastmilk, formula, and feeding equipment. Consider putting a scarf or blanket over your shoulder to cover your baby while you feed.

If you have a support person who is feeling well, consider having them prepare the bottle and feed your baby. Your support person should continue to practice good hygiene to help protect your baby.

17. Is there anything I need to know if I usually feed my baby formula?

If you are using infant formula to feed your baby:

- Purchase a reasonable amount of formula (e.g., a 2-week supply).
- If you need to temporarily switch to a different type of formula, it may take about 2 weeks for your baby's system to adapt. You might notice that your baby's stool looks different or that they pass stool more or less often. If you have any concerns, like [constipation](#), talk with your health care provider.
- If you are purchasing infant formula online, only order a Canadian brand of formula. For more information, visit [HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca](#).
- Do not give homemade formula. [Homemade formula does not offer proper nutrition and can make your baby very sick.](#)

If you have difficulty accessing infant formula, contact Alberta 211 for community resources, social services, and financial supports.

Caring for your baby

18. If I have COVID-19, will I still be able to care for my 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. If you have COVID-19 or are feeling unwell, wash your hands before providing direct care and wear a mask while providing direct care (see above).

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

19. If my COVID-19 swab is positive will my baby have the illness too?

If you tested positive, then your baby will also be tested for COVID-19 before discharge from the hospital. If your baby's swab is negative, they will not need further testing, unless they develop symptoms.

If your baby's first swab is positive, your health care provider will arrange to have another test completed. If the second swab is negative, a third swab will be collected to confirm results.

20. What are some signs that my baby may be unwell?

If your baby seems unwell and develops any of the signs or symptoms listed below, seek help.

Go to the Emergency Department **NOW** if your baby is **under 3 months** and has an underarm temperature that is lower than 36.5 °C (97.8 °F) or higher than 37.5 °C (99.5 °F).

Call 911 **NOW** if your baby has any of the following:

- is breathing slowly or has stopped breathing
- is having trouble breathing or is wheezing
- has flared nostrils
- is grunting
- has blue or grey skin
- is limp or not moving
- if you're having trouble waking up your baby

Call Health Link at 811 or your health care provider if your baby has any of the following:

- has a high or low temperature (higher than 37.5 °C or lower than 36.5 °C)
- is breathing faster than usual
- has a cough

- is vomiting
- has diarrhea
- is more sleepy than usual
- is not feeding well

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's health at any time, call Health Link at 811 or talk with your health care provider.

21. 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. Some classes may be offered as live, virtual classes. A self-directed, 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