

Pregnancy, Birthing and Bringing Baby Home



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

- Pregnant people are not more likely to become infected with COVID-19 than people who are not pregnant.
- Most pregnant people who get COVID-19 will have a mild course of illness, but deliver healthy, full-term babies. However, there is evolving evidence that pregnancy puts you at higher risk for severe COVID-19. Giving birth too early in pregnancy (pre-term birth) is more common in pregnant people with severe COVID-19.
- Some pregnant people are at especially high risk of complications from severe COVID-19, particularly if they are age 35 years and older, or have severe or uncontrolled asthma, obesity, pre-pregnancy or gestational diabetes, pre-pregnancy high blood pressure, heart disease or other chronic diseases.
- The risk that a mother passed COVID-19 to their infant during pregnancy is very low. Some newborns test positive for COVID-19 shortly after birth, however it is not known if these newborns got the virus before, during, or after birth. Most newborns who tested positive for COVID-19 had mild or no symptoms and recovered.
- The risk of a newborn getting COVID-19 from their mother is low, especially when the mother takes steps such as wearing a mask and washing hands.
- While the virus has been found in breast milk, the virus is not thought to be spread through breast milk. The benefits of breastfeeding continue to outweigh the risks of breastfeeding, even if a mother has COVID-19.
- Like everyone else, pregnant people need to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19 and get tested if they develop symptoms. Call your health care provider if you develop symptoms or if you have further questions.
- Staying active is important for your physical and mental health during pregnancy.

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:

- Limit activities to essential trips such as groceries, pharmacy and prenatal appointments. Additional activities, based on local epidemiology, may be discussed with your prenatal care provider. Limit travel to essential trips only, even within Manitoba.
- When leaving the house to obtain essentials, be sure to physically distance, wear a mask in indoor public places and avoid crowded spaces.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Check the hand sanitizer label for *Do Not Use in Pregnancy*.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.

- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Talk to your prenatal care provider about whether the COVID-19 vaccine is right for you.
- Follow Public Health Orders. These change depending on the number of cases and how they are being transmitted. See [manitoba.ca/covid19/restartmb/prs/](https://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/restartmb/prs/) for the current guidelines and restrictions.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and what should I do if I have symptoms?

Symptoms can range from mild (e.g., fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat) to severe (e.g., shortness of breath, difficulty breathing). For a complete list of symptoms, when and where to get tested, see [manitoba.ca/covid19/fundamentals/symptoms.html](https://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/fundamentals/symptoms.html).

If you are pregnant and develop fever, cough, shortness of breath or weakness, it could be COVID-19, another illness or a complication of pregnancy. Call your health care provider or Health Links – Info Santé at **204-788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** about assessment and testing.

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

If you are pregnant or have recently delivered you should go to your regular appointments with your 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 have one designated support person who may be present during labour and delivery and may be able to visit after delivery.

You and your support person will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and possible exposures at the hospital entrance. Although you may not have symptoms, you, like all other people being admitted to the hospital, may be tested for COVID-19.

- 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 may not be able to enter the hospital with you, so plan for an alternate support person.

Hospital staff will be wearing protective equipment such as gowns, masks, gloves and eye protection when caring for you, to protect you, themselves, and others.

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.

Can I hold my baby for skin-to-skin or feeding if I have COVID-19?

Yes. You can hold baby skin-to-skin, and hold your baby for breastfeeding or bottle feeding if you have or might have COVID-19. Hospital staff will tell you how to lower the risk of infection.

To keep your baby safe:

- Wash your hands before and after touching your baby. If you have recently coughed or sneezed with your chest exposed, cleanse the breast area with soap and water before breastfeeding or holding baby skin-to-skin.
- Wear a medical face mask, or if unavailable, a non-medical mask or face covering when close to your baby.
- 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 your baby. If you have coughed or sneezed into your arm or sleeve, wash your arm or change your clothes before handling your baby.

What can I do if I feel too unwell with COVID-19 to feed my 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 support is available by calling **204-788-8667** (in Winnipeg) or toll free at **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 baby safe from COVID-19?

- Stay at home. It is best to limit visitors. Follow current Public Health orders including visitor and gathering restrictions.

See manitoba.ca/covid19/restartmb/prs/ for the current guidelines and restrictions.

If you do have visitors, make sure they wash their hands once they enter your home, wear a mask, and practice physical distancing. You can also consider virtual or window visits.

- Household members, including children, should follow all public health fundamentals, including cleaning their hands frequently, as well as physical distancing when outside of the home and wearing a face mask. (Do not put a mask on your baby or any child under the age of two.)
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Check the label for *Do Not Use in Pregnancy*.
- Baby should not sleep in the same room as anyone who is sick (cough, sneezing, fever), such as your partner, or other children. This will help protect your baby.

If I have COVID-19, how do I take care of my new baby?

Even if you have mild symptoms or no symptoms, take precautions to avoid spreading it to your baby.

- Wear a medical mask, or if unavailable, a non-medical mask or face covering when close to your baby.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes. Wash your hands frequently.
- 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.
- 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.
- If you have COVID-19, place the crib or bassinet at least two metres (six feet) away from your bed. Keep the room door open or open the window slightly, as the weather allows to promote good airflow.

For more information on Safe Sleep see, <https://healthyparentingwinnipeg.ca/safe-sleep-andyour-baby/>.

Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

According to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SOGC), the COVID-19 vaccine may be offered to people who are pregnant or breastfeeding after they have reviewed the risks and benefits with their immunizer or health care provider. Given that pregnancy increases the risk for severe COVID-19 symptoms, getting the vaccine during pregnancy may be the right choice for you. For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy, talk to your prenatal care provider and see www.manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/covidvaccine/covid19_vaccine_pregnant.pdf.