

Short Article

Effect of COVID-19 on Pregnancy and Fetus

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The COVID-19 outbreak is upending daily life everywhere. Pregnant women and others anticipating the birth of a new baby have good reason to wonder what kind of effect the novel coronavirus will have on the health of their unborn children.

There is no such clinical evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from the novel coronavirus but pregnant women have been included at moderate risk as a precaution. At this point in the global pandemic of COVID-19 infection, there is no evidence that coronavirus undergoes intrauterine or transplacental transmission from infected pregnant women to their fetuses.¹

Effect of COVID-19 on Pregnancy

There is no such major complication or effect of COVID-19 on pregnancy. The majority of pregnant women are asymptomatic. Only fewer can show mild fever and cough. The majority of the women were discharged without any major complications, and there was no evidence of vertical transmission of the COVID-19 infection.

Effect on Pre-Existing Medical Conditions

- The Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) do not yet know if COVID-19 affects the health of a fetus or a newborn or how it may impact pregnancy and childbirth²
- The World Health Organization (WHO) is urging pregnant women to take all possible precautions to reduce their risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19³
- Any pregnant woman who experiences symptoms of COVID-19 must inform her healthcare provider immediately
- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not yet know how COVID-19 will affect pregnant women or their unborn babies⁴
- To date, only a few pregnant women with COVID-19 have given birth. However, the CDC reported that no babies born to women with the disease have tested positive for the virus²
- There have been instances of women with COVID-19 delivering prematurely, but scientists cannot say for sure that these early births were due to COVID-19
- In a CDC Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA), researchers reviewed data gathered from 34 pregnant women who had COVID-19. These women had a median age of 30 and had tested positive for COVID-19 in their second or third trimesters.

The researchers had no data on women who got the disease earlier in their pregnancy⁵

Effect of COVID-19 on Fetus

The researchers still do not know if a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can pass the virus that causes COVID-19 to her fetus or baby during pregnancy or delivery. No infants born to mothers with COVID-19 have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. In these cases, which are a small number, the virus was not found in samples of amniotic fluid or breastmilk.

Effect during Birthing

Scientists have little data to work with when it comes to determining how COVID-19 affects birth. However, COCA identified that many of the babies born to women who had COVID-19 were born preterm.

However, there is not enough data to determine whether the preterm deliveries occurred due to complications stemming from COVID-19 itself or other causes.

According to the CDC, researchers have not found the virus in the amniotic fluid of women with COVID-19.²

Effect during Postpartum Period

Due to the recent appearance of SARS-CoV-2, researchers have not had much time to study its effects on or the outlook for infants born to mothers with COVID-19.

Healthcare professionals need to take special action for a baby born to a woman with COVID-19. According to current hospital procedures, they should treat the baby as a Person Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19.

The WHO still encourages mothers with COVID-19 to hold and breastfeed their babies because this close connection is essential for newborns. They also encourage mothers to share a room with their babies. These women must follow strict safety procedures.

The hospital staff should care for pregnant women with COVID-19 according to the procedures the facility has in place for other people with COVID-19. This may include staying in private rooms, away from other people.

Effect on Breastfeeding

One of the biggest questions new mothers with COVID-19 may have is whether they should breastfeed their babies. Breast milk has many benefits for newborns-it is not only rich in nutrients, but it is also a great source of antibodies and hormones that protect newborns from diseases and help them grow strong.

Experts generally recommend that women breastfeed as much as possible. But women with COVID-19 might worry about passing the virus on to their infants.

The CDC state that researchers did not find SARS-CoV-2 in the breast milk of women with COVID-19. Women with COVID-19 must take precautions to ensure they do not transmit the virus to their babies when breastfeeding. Women who plan to breastfeed should wear a face mask and disinfect their hands before touching the baby.²

If a woman with COVID-19 plans to pump her breast milk, she must disinfect her hands and the pump before and after each use. Where possible, someone who does not have the disease should do the actual feeding.

Precautions for Pregnant Women against Coronavirus

Here are some precautions women can take to prevent getting the disease during pregnancy:

- Wash your hands frequently. Hand hygiene can really protect you from exposure to COVID-19. You may hear this over and over but with good reason
- Use a tissue when you or anyone in your family coughs or sneezes, discard this and wash your hands
- Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus. These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
- Avoid non-essential use of public transport when possible
- Use telephone or online services
- Practice social distancing. Always maintain a distance of at least 2 meters or 6 feet from others when you are in a public place. Avoid contact with others as much as possible
- Use a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue in the dustbin. Wash your hands right after
- Work from home whenever possible
- Stay safe. Symptoms such as high fever with or without continuous cough may indicate a possible coronavirus infection. Avoid coming in close contact with anyone showing these symptoms
- Do not stress too much if your due date is nearing, as hospitals have a system in place for safe deliveries and to ensure minimal risk of exposure for newborns

Conclusion

COVID-19 is such a new disease that there is not yet much data about how it affects pregnant women, their fetuses, their newborns, and the future health status of these infants and their mothers.

The limited data available suggests that pregnant women do not pass SARS-CoV-2 to their babies in the womb, in amniotic fluid, or breast milk.

There is, however, a possibility that COVID-19 might increase the risk of preterm birth, although there is no firm evidence to confirm this pandemic effect.

Conflict of Interest: None

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