

COVID-19 IN PREGNANCY



Patient and Family Education

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This information leaflet is intended for pregnant women, and women who just had their babies. It also includes some information for pregnant women whether or not they are infected by COVID-19.

What is Corona virus disease (COVID-19)?

The term COVID-19 refers to “Coronavirus Disease 2019”. It is caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. It was first reported in 2019 in Wuhan, China.

What should I do if I suspect I am pregnant?

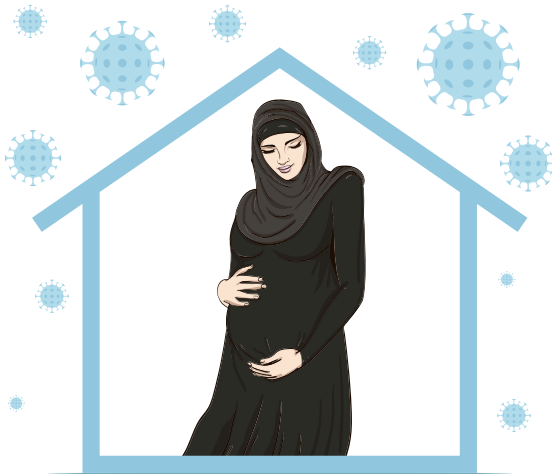
If you missed your period for six weeks or more, or a home pregnancy test came positive, or think you are pregnant; you will need to contact the health center as per your geographical location.

How can I protect myself against COVID-19 when I am pregnant?

Pregnant women should follow the same precautions – as others – to avoid COVID-19 infection. Further information is available on the Ministry of Public Health website.

Are pregnant women more susceptible to COVID-19 than the general population?

As yet, we don't know much about COVID-19 and pregnancy. However, from what we know so far, pregnant women are not more likely to acquire the disease than the general population (if they are at same age and have similar risk factors).



If I get infected, can this infection be more severe compared to non-pregnant women?

Pregnancy alters the body's immune system and generally affects the pregnant woman's response to viral infections in general, causing in some cases more severe symptoms. However, from what we know so far, if healthy pregnant women do acquire COVID-19, they are not more likely to get severe symptoms as pneumonia than other healthy non-pregnant women (after adjusting for other factors as age, body mass index (BMI) and associated other health issues as diabetes or hypertension). Fortunately, most women who get COVID-19 when pregnant, recover before giving birth.

If I have COVID-19, can the baby be negatively affected by my infection?

From what we know so far, COVID-19 is unlikely to cause birth defects in babies, affects the baby's development nor does infection increase your risk of miscarriage.

Although the available evidence is limited, it could be possible that baby, while still in the womb, can get infected. A very small number of babies have been tested positive for Covid-19 soon after birth. We are not certain yet if this infection occurred in the uterus (womb) or if it happened soon after birth. So far, neither this is confirmed nor the exact risk the baby could face in case of getting an infection is known. However, on a positive note, so far, all reported cases of newborn babies who develop covid-19 very soon after birth; these babies were well.



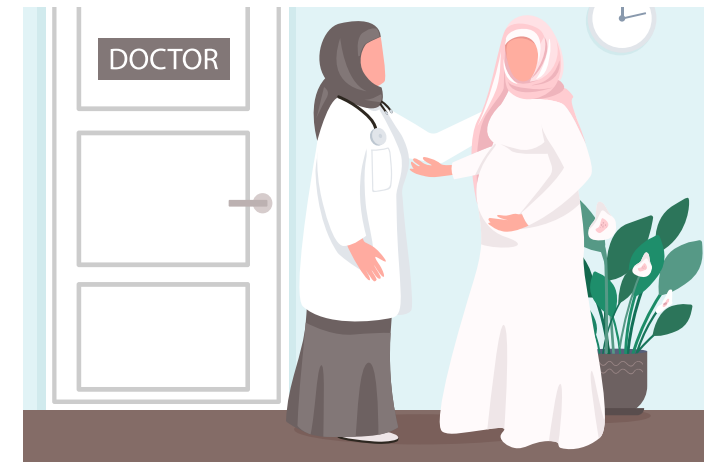
What happens if I get COVID-19 while pregnant?

You will be assessed by the dedicated team who will guide on your management and follow up location. Most pregnant women can be isolated in one of the quarantine facilities. Only a few pregnant women with COVID-19 will require admission to hospital for treatment, usually this is provided at a COVID-19 dedicated facility, until their condition improves and then they are transferred to one of the quarantine facilities. This could be a stressful time, especially if you have other children. It is better to ask your family members to take care of your children, while you are isolated in quarantine.

I do not have COVID-19, how am I going to be followed up during my pregnancy?

We have minimized the number of visits to hospital to see the doctors and midwives. However, your cancelled in-person appointments will be replaced with a phone consultation with one of our doctors. In other words, most of your routine appointments are still scheduled, but some will be conducted over the phone, and others will be done physically when you visit to the hospital. Our specialist doctors will review your file two days before your appointment and determine if you need to come for a physical appointment or you just need a phone consultation.

This does not affect your blood tests or ultrasound as you can still come and have them done. The Doctor will follow this up with a phone call, or you will be asked to be seen to explain the results in your next scheduled appointment. As for medications, they could be prescribed after a phone consultation with your doctor.



It is likely that our doctors will see you physically in the clinic at 24-28 weeks, 32-36 weeks, 38,39,40 weeks. You will be seen more frequently if your condition shows necessity or if you have certain medical conditions.

These measures are only for scheduled or routine appointments. The Emergency Department is open 24/7 if you have any acute condition or complications such as bleeding or decreased baby movement or any other emergency.

It is very important that you wear a mask, follow social distancing and other safety precautions outlined by the MOPH, to limit spread of infection.

We understand that these changes can be stressful to you, but they are there to protect you and minimize spread of infection. We need you to be assured that these measures will have minimal effect (if any) on the overall care you will receive during pregnancy.



Will COVID-19 affect mode or timing of delivery? Can I still have a normal vaginal delivery if I have an infection?

It is unlikely that the mode of delivery will be affected by having COVID-19 infection. Most (around 80%) of pregnant women do not have symptoms or have minimal symptoms. In most cases having an infection will not affect your mode of delivery and you can still achieve a normal delivery if that is what is planned in your case. It is unlikely that you will have a cesarean delivery just because you are infected by COVID-19.

Having an infection doesn't mean automatically that this will affect the timing of your delivery or that we will deliver you earlier. In most cases if you are well, your pregnancy will normally continue as if you are not infected.

In very few cases especially if you have severe symptoms and have pneumonia, you may have an increased risk of preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks). We don't know yet if the severe infection leads to the preterm delivery or that doctors decide to deliver you early because you are very sick to benefit your health and get you better.

Pregnancy itself, increases the risk for clotting in the legs and lungs. There is also some evidence that COVID-19 is a hypercoagulable state (another risk factor for clots). For that reason, you will be offered blood thinning injections if you are admitted with COVID-19.



Where will I deliver if I have COVID-19 infection?

If you have a COVID-19 positive test it is likely you will usually deliver at a COVID-19 dedicated facility, caring for pregnant women. We have a dedicated team of experts there to take care of you and your baby during the pregnancy and delivery. Our doctors will guide you where to go.

However, if you are in established labour or have bleeding for example or another emergency, you will need to go to the hospital nearest to you.

What should I expect during and after delivery?

We recommend all women (even if they have no infection) to wear masks during delivery. Although this may be uncomfortable to you, yet it is important to minimize spread of infection.

We advise epidural (regional anaesthesia) in labour. This will decrease the pain and decrease your spread of infection if you are in much pain. Furthermore, it will reduce the need of general anesthesia if you need one for any reason.

Currently we are testing all women at delivery or on admission to the hospital, for COVID-19 whether or not they have symptoms. If you turn to be positive and your condition allows transfer (example not bleeding or very early in labour), you may be transferred to a dedicated facility for pregnant women with COVID-19.

You may not be allowed to have relatives visit you, during or after delivery if you have COVID-19. This is to minimize spread of infection to other family members and minimize spread of infection overall. However, we will have all the support you need from our dedicated staff, midwives and nurses to care for you and your newborn baby whenever you need support.



Can I still breast feed if I have an infection?

Infection with COVID-19 is not a contraindication to breastfeeding. Breastfeeding has many benefits for mother and baby. We do not think based on the evidence available that breast milk contains the virus. However, your close contact with the baby during breast feeding may lead to spread of infection to the baby.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that mothers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be encouraged to initiate or continue to breastfeed as the benefits of breastfeeding substantially outweigh the potential risks for transmission (spread of infection to your baby). Your healthcare provider will discuss this issue with you after delivery.

Provided you and your baby are well and the baby doesn't need special care in the neonatal unit, you will be able to stay together with your baby (rooming-in) and breast feeding can be started, if it is your choice to breast feed.

Only few mothers will be too unwell to breast feed or take care of their baby. In that case you will be supported to provide the baby with formula or breast milk and our team will help take care of both you and your baby, till you are better.

Some tips for caring for the baby after birth

1. Wearing a face mask while caring or feeding the baby
2. Wash hands before touching the baby, breast pump or bottles
3. Avoid coughing or sneezing on the baby while feeding
4. Where a breast pump is used, follow recommendations for pump cleaning after each use
5. For babies who are bottle-fed with formula or expressed milk, strict adherence to sterilisation guidelines is recommended.

Are you testing the baby for COVID-19 after delivery?

We test all babies born to confirmed COVID-19 positive mothers or if babies become symptomatic during the isolation period.

I have an infection and just delivered, where will I go after discharge from hospital?

In some cases, for example 12 hours after a normal delivery and if your condition is stable after delivery and your results come out as positive for COVID-19, you may be transferred to a dedicated facility caring for women with COVID-19 and pregnancy; to continue the rest of your post-partum period there.

Based on your clinical condition and other factors, if you are discharged from hospital, you may be transferred to home isolation or one of our quarantine facilities. Your doctors will discuss that with you after delivery.

What if I want to know more?

1. Visit the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) website www.moph.gov.qa for more information on COVID-19.
2. Call the national COVID-19 hotline on 16000 for all enquiries. The hotline is available 24/7.
3. Install and activate EHTEAZ app on your smart phone and you will receive daily, latest updates and notifications from MOPH

Finally, kindly be aware that this information leaflet is not a substitute for consultation with the doctors and that as we learn more about COVID-19 and pregnancy some of the information will be updated accordingly.

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