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GUIDE TO

PREGNANCY AND BABY'S ARRIVAL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



A publication of CHU Sainte-Justine, CHU de Québec–Université Laval, CIUSSS de l’Estrie – CHUS, CIUSSS West-Central Montreal, McGill University Health Center and Montreal West Island Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre.

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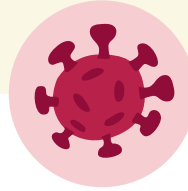
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5 **OVERVIEW**
- 7 **COVID-19 AND FAMILY**
 - COVID-19 in children
 - Daycare and school
- 8 Spouse who works in a high-risk environment
 - What to do if there are symptoms?
- 9 **PREGNANCY**
 - Protecting yourself from COVID-19 during pregnancy
 - Pregnant woman's workplace
- 10 **CHILDBIRTH**
 - Accompanying person during childbirth
 - Testing for COVID-19
- 11 Wearing a mask
 - Birth plan
- 12 Visits after birth
- 13 **BABY HAS ARRIVED**
 - Postnatal follow-up
 - General tips for protecting baby
- 14 Home visits
- 15 **BREASTFEEDING**
- 16 **COVID-19 SECTION**
 - Living with COVID-19 during pregnancy
 - 17 Living with COVID-19 during childbirth
 - 18 Living with COVID-19 after childbirth
 - Breastfeeding
 - 19 Spouse, siblings or relatives with COVID-19
- 20 **MAINTAINING YOUR WELL-BEING DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY**
 - How to do it
 - 21 Take care of yourself, one day at a time
 - 22 Explore stress management and hobbies
 - Be in the moment
 - 23 Stay connected
 - Take care of yourself
 - Limit your exposure to news
- 24 **MATERNITY AND MENTAL HEALTH**
 - The baby blues or postpartum depression
 - 25 When the blues drag on...
- 26 **RESOURCES**
 - Resources to support you during and after pregnancy
 - General resources
 - Additional support
- 27 Additional information



Pregnancy and everything surrounding the arrival of a baby are both extraordinary and unsettling. During a pandemic, with all of the uncertainty of the unprecedented social situation created by COVID-19, stress is often intensified. So, it's normal to ask questions, to be concerned about our safety and to experience additional anxiety in these extraordinary times.

This guide provides an overview of the situation and associated scientific data and is also a reference for pregnant women, new parents and their families. It covers pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period during COVID-19, ensuring above all that these moments are filled with happiness.

OVERVIEW

The data collected since early 2020 from around the world are quite encouraging for pregnant women and newborns:



Mother-to-baby transmission of the COVID-19 virus during pregnancy is very rare worldwide.



COVID-19 does not appear to cause fetal malformations.



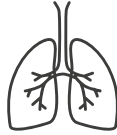
Most pregnant women infected with COVID-19 have mild or no symptoms, and very few pregnant women are hospitalized because of the disease.



Very few newborns are affected by the virus.

OVERVIEW

Keep in mind:



After the age of 35 or when there are other risk factors, such as chronic hypertension or pre-existing diabetes in pregnancy, some infected pregnant women may present with severe pneumonia.



The risk of intensive care hospitalization for infected pregnant women, particularly in the **second** and **third trimesters**, is higher than for non-pregnant women of the same age, but remains lower than for pregnant women infected with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).



COVID-19 poses some risk of **preterm birth**, but this risk is lower than for other viruses in the same family.

It remains important to protect yourself against COVID-19 by following the public health rules for the general population.

COVID-19 AND FAMILY

COVID-19 IN CHILDREN

COVID-19 appears to pose a much lower risk to infants and children than to adults. When they are affected by the virus, children are less prone to developing complications and, if they do, they are usually mild.

Young children (0-9 years) who have few symptoms of COVID-19 appear to be less contagious than adults (as is not the case with influenza) and are not recognized as major vectors of transmission.

DAYCARE AND SCHOOL

Although preschoolers are not major vectors of COVID-19 transmission, the choice of sending them to daycare can be complex during pregnancy and when the new baby comes home.

Unfortunately, there is no straightforward response to this issue. As no solution is «risk-free,» assessing the situation and making a decision can cause anxiety or even feelings of helplessness or guilt.

In order to make a decision that takes into account your overall health, both mental and physical, it's important to keep in mind what your needs are, to pay attention to your emotions and to show yourself compassion and kindness. Remember that the evidence is clear that children and adults under the age of 40 are at very low risk of being affected by severe forms of COVID-19. However, don't hesitate to seek the advice of your health professional if a family member has a health condition.

Help from your surroundings or child care may minimize the momentary feeling of being overwhelmed and allow you to get the rest that is essential for parents after the birth of a baby. Siblings will need special moments with their parents, as well as comforting routines, as they experience big changes in the family structure.

It's important not to overlook these elements, as pregnancy and the postpartum period are phases of life that increase vulnerability to mental health problems. A harmonious family environment will help everyone adjust to the new situation.

When your older children attend daycare or school:

- Follow basic sanitary measures, both at home and away from home
- Follow the rules put in place by the school or daycare
- Be on the lookout for symptoms of COVID-19

SPOUSE WHO WORKS IN A HIGH-RISK ENVIRONMENT

When your spouse works in a high-risk environment, it's essential that they follow all public health prevention measures in the workplace.



WHAT TO DO IF THERE ARE SYMPTOMS?

If a family member has one or more COVID-19 symptoms or has been in close contact with someone who has contracted COVID-19:

1



Go to the covid19.quebec.ca website to make an appointment for a COVID test (phone 1-877-644-4545, if necessary)

2



Notify the school, daycare and/or workplace

3



Stay home until the test result is received

4



If the person concerned is a parent, they should wear a mask and isolate from other family members as much as possible

5



Contact your clinic to change the date of your pregnancy follow-up appointment, ultrasound, etc.

6



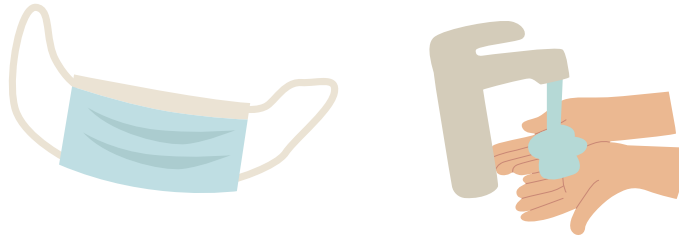
Follow the public health measures that apply to your situation

PREGNANCY

PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM COVID-19 DURING PREGNANCY

The Quebec government invites pregnant women to follow the [same health guidelines as the rest of the population](#), including **hand washing** and **wearing a masking** in public places.

Each pregnancy is different and requires follow-ups with a health care professional, and these appointments should be kept even in the current circumstances. However, depending on each woman's situation, the health care professional may choose to have some appointments via telemedicine rather than in person. Do not hesitate to discuss your work situation with them.



PREGNANT WOMAN'S WORKPLACE

During their pregnancy, pregnant women in Quebec can take advantage of the [For a Safe Maternity Experience](#) program of the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST). Specific recommendations for the COVID-19 situation have been issued to cover the eligibility criteria, compensation, preventive leave from work and other possible options.

Pregnant women are encouraged to discuss their work situation with their attending physician so they can make wise choices for their own health and that of the child they are carrying.



CHILDBIRTH

Childbirth during the COVID-19 pandemic is the same as in normal times, following the same care practices. However, there will be a change in the number of people permitted to accompany the mother and make postnatal visits.

ACCOMPANYING PERSON DURING CHILDBIRTH

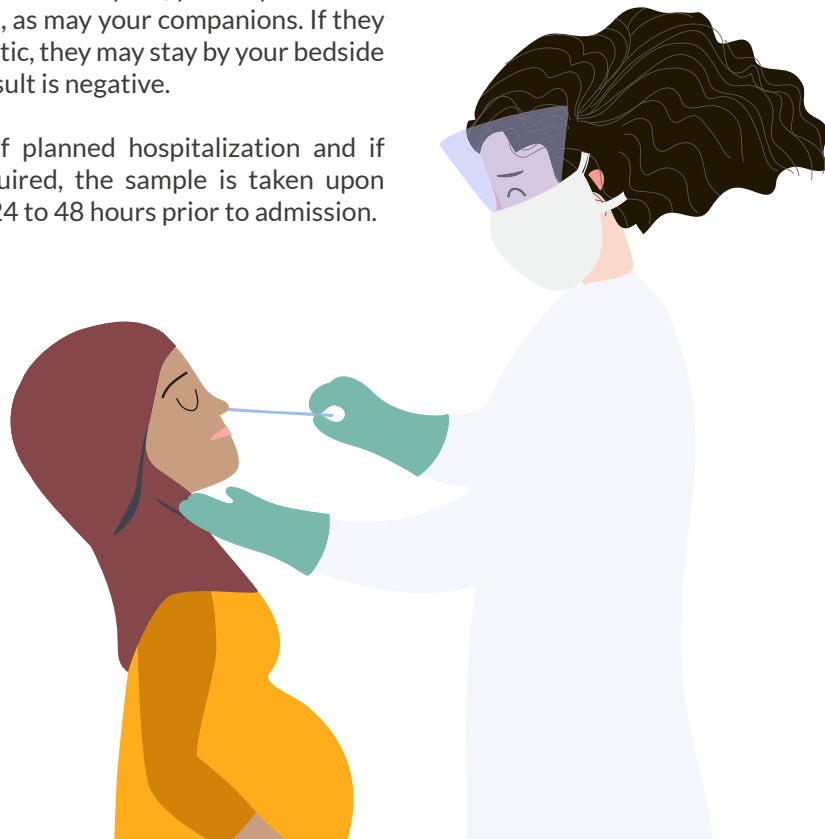
According to [government guidelines](#):

- At the time of delivery, pregnant women may be accompanied by a significant person;
- Certain specific measures must be applied to reduce the risk of contagion **according to the public health alert level**, including the right or not to be accompanied by a second person. The number of people present may also vary depending on the size of the physical space where the delivery takes place

TESTING FOR COVID-19

Upon arriving at the hospital, you may be tested for COVID-19, as may your companions. If they are symptomatic, they may stay by your bedside if their test result is negative.

In the case of planned hospitalization and if testing is required, the sample is taken upon admission or 24 to 48 hours prior to admission.





WEARING A MASK

To ensure your safety and that of others, wearing a mask is mandatory from the moment you arrive to the moment you leave the hospital. Depending on your health, your test results (if applicable) and the hospital in which you give birth, you may have to wear a mask throughout your delivery.

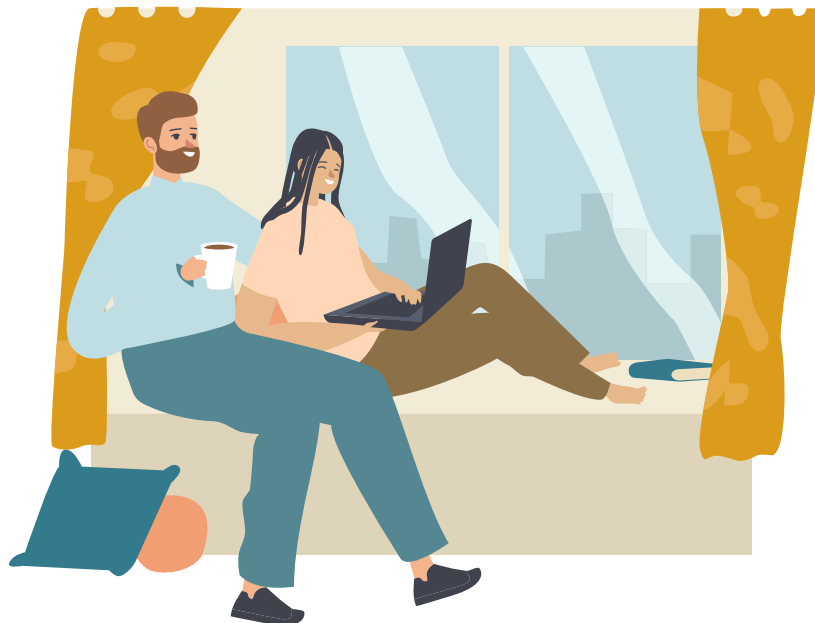
Your companions must wear a mask at all times.

The facility will provide the masks you will need on site, together with instructions for their use.

BIRTH PLAN

As the health care professional monitoring your pregnancy will tell you, it can be helpful to prepare a birth plan. This plan specifies your wishes for the course of your delivery and takes into account the health measures in place in the context of the current situation. It also ensures that your instructions will already be established and realistic, and can be followed according to the circumstances at the appropriate time.

You can talk to your health care professional about a birth plan that takes into account your needs, your wishes and the circumstances in your environment.



VISITS AFTER BIRTH

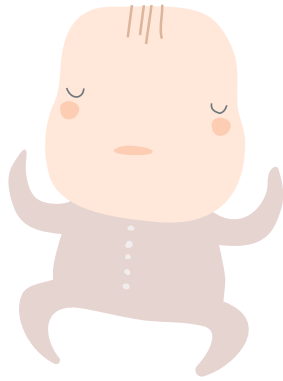
In general, one significant person may be present during the postnatal stay if they do not present a risk of infection.

Unfortunately, due to the current situation, children and other family members are not allowed to visit. But remember that virtual means are a great way to keep in touch with your loved ones and introduce them to your baby.



BABY HAS ARRIVED

You did it! Baby is born and now it's time to take the little one home.



POSTNATAL FOLLOW-UP

The **postnatal home follow-up** offered by the health network (CLSC) is still in place. Parents should receive a call 24 to 48 hours after leaving the birthing facility.

Home or clinic visits are also provided, in accordance with prevention guidelines. If you are giving birth with a midwife, she is the one who will do the follow-up at home.

The mother and baby's health will be assessed during these visits and questions will be answered to help parents adjust to their newborn.

GENERAL TIPS FOR PROTECTING BABY

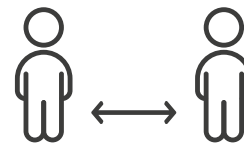
These are the precautions to take when returning home with your baby. Basic hygiene measures:



Wash your hands frequently



Cough into your elbow



Keep a distance of two metres, except when caring for baby, and wear a mask when COVID-19 symptoms are present

If you are in isolation, it's important to follow the recommendations provided to you.

Check with your doctor as soon as possible or take your child to the emergency room if they are less than 3 months old and have a fever or you are concerned about their condition.

HOME VISITS

The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux recommends that families with newborns not have visitors unless they come to provide support. They must not have COVID-19 symptoms, have been in contact with a person with symptoms similar to COVID-19, or be waiting for a COVID-19 test result. Hand hygiene and wearing a mask are required.

In any case, as parents, you have the right to set limits. The important thing is to be comfortable with the guidelines, such as:

- Always wash hands before touching the baby or siblings
- Wear a mask
- Avoid kissing
- And other general hygiene measures

The most important thing for a baby in the first months of life is being close to its parent(s). Contact with other family members can be added gradually.



Virtual means are a great way to stay in touch with your loved ones.

BREASTFEEDING

Women who wish to breastfeed their child are encouraged to do so, and if you don't have COVID-19 you can breastfeed as usual. To learn more, see [Breastfeeding during the Pandemic – Information for Parents](#), a guide published by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

Based on current knowledge, being infected with COVID-19 is not a contraindication to breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact. If you are infected, consult the «Living with COVID-19 after delivery» section of this guide for advice.

Remember that no matter what the situation, breastfeeding is a skill that both you and your child need to learn. You may have to reach out for support. There are [resources to support you in all stages of your breastfeeding](#).





LIVING WITH COVID-19 DURING PREGNANCY

The majority of pregnant women infected with COVID-19 have mild or no symptoms, and very few pregnant women are hospitalized because of the disease. Those who have, or have had, a symptomatic COVID-19 infection receive follow-up appropriate to their health status.

During the second and third trimester of pregnancy, pregnant women are at higher risk of developing severe symptoms of COVID-19 because of the significant physiological changes they are experiencing. This risk particularly affects women who have an underlying condition, such as high blood pressure, pre-existing diabetes, older age, obesity or chronic respiratory failure.

Current data show that COVID-19 poses a lower risk of preterm birth than do other viruses in the same family. In addition, unlike other viruses that can cause birth defects, COVID-19 does not appear to have a negative impact on the fetus and is transmitted to the baby during pregnancy only in very rare cases.



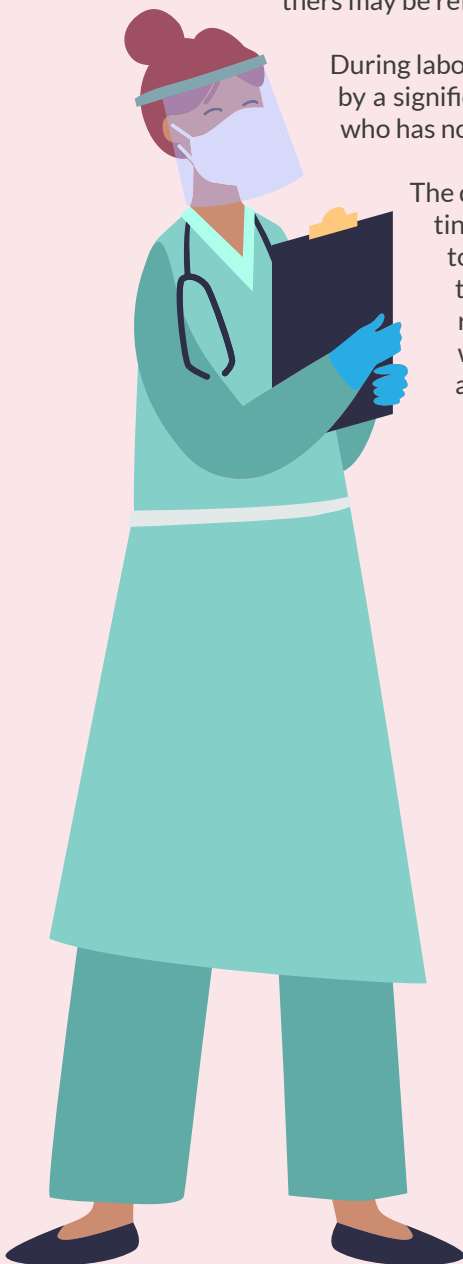


LIVING WITH COVID-19 DURING CHILDBIRTH

Pregnant women with COVID-19 at the time of delivery must give birth in a hospital setting so that they or their babies can quickly benefit from the care of a specialized medical team should a problem arise. In regional hospitals, COVID-19 positive mothers may be referred to a designated hospital.

During labour and delivery, women with COVID-19 may be accompanied by a significant person who does not have symptoms of COVID-19 and who has not recently had a positive COVID-19 test result.

The delivery process may be adapted to avoid the risk of transmitting the virus. Among other things, the health care staff will have to be dressed to protect themselves from the virus, and the patient and her companion will have to remain isolated in their room throughout the stay. Instructions specific to the hospital where the delivery takes place are given to pregnant women and their companions by the health care staff.





LIVING WITH COVID-19 AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Following delivery, **if the mother and her baby don't require additional care**, skin-to-skin contact and cohabitation are permitted. However, a COVID-19-positive mother must wear a procedural mask and stay two metres away from others, including her newborn (except for newborn care), until the end of her isolation period.

BREASTFEEDING

The virus is not present in breast milk. Even if you have tested positive for COVID-19, government and public health recommendations are to [continue breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact](#), simply adding a few precautions to your routine:

- Wash your hands before picking up your baby or breastfeeding
- Wear a procedural mask

The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the risk of transmitting the virus to the baby. To find out more, see the guide titled [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Breastfeeding – Information for Mothers with COVID-19](#), published by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.





SPOUSE, SIBLINGS OR RELATIVES WITH COVID-19

If your children, spouse or someone living with you experiences COVID-19 symptoms, is waiting for a test result or has the virus, it's essential to put some measures in place.

These safeguards include the following: the entire household must wash their hands, maintain physical distancing from other family members (separate bathrooms if possible, meals in different areas, etc.), practice preventive isolation from all family members, and the infected adults must wear procedural masks. In addition, it's important to monitor for symptoms in other family members.

People who test positive for COVID-19 and those in their family bubble must stay home until a public health worker calls them and provides specific instructions for their situation. If you are a contact of someone who has tested positive, you can be tested ideally four to five days after contact. If the contact was significant, it would be prudent to isolate yourself while waiting for the test result.

Go to the CHU Sainte-Justine website for more information: chusj.org/FAQcovid19



If you are concerned about your child's health, don't hesitate to consult a health care professional.

MAINTAINING YOUR WELL-BEING DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY

HOW TO DO IT

Pregnancy and the arrival of a child are important and pivotal events. The current situation may make you feel fearful, anxious or stressed. You may also experience feelings of injustice, lack of control, and perhaps even anger or sadness. This unusual situation is probably very different from what you had hoped to experience during your pregnancy or maternity leave.

It's essential to look after your well-being for the sake of your own health and that of your baby. Here are some ways to do this:

- Take care of yourself on a daily basis, with compassion and kindness
- Make sure you have non-judgmental emotional support
- Find ways to manage your stress
- Take up hobbies
- Be in the moment
- Maintain your relationships with your loved ones
- Limit your exposure to negative news
- Ask for help when you need it



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, ONE DAY AT A TIME



After months of pregnancy and hours of labour, it's important to recover and get some rest. Lack of sleep can lead to physical discomfort and exhaustion.

Try to get some rest when your baby sleeps. You'll be in better shape to take care of your child and meet their needs.

Stay hydrated and eat well during this recovery period. Healthy snacks are important; make sure you get them.

Although it's recommended that you maintain a certain routine to keep your spirits up during periods of physical distancing, this can be difficult to do with a newborn. Take the time to get to know your baby in the comfort of your own home. That's all you need to be doing right now.



EXPLORE STRESS MANAGEMENT AND HOBBIES

There are all sorts of ways to manage your stress. The techniques you may have used in the past to get through difficult times are sure to be useful to you now.

You can also try new relaxation exercises such as mindful meditation (use apps to guide you). However, relaxation is not for everyone.

You can also take care of yourself through exercise or by practising meditation. Art, listening to music or to podcasts can be great ways to relax.



BE IN THE MOMENT

Do one thing at a time and gently focus on what the situation requires in the moment. It's normal for feelings and emotions to come and go; acknowledge them without judging them.

Consciously acknowledging an emotion or thought that causes anxiety can actually help reduce psychological distress. Find an anchor, such as paying attention to your breathing, to help you feel better.

Breathing has always been used to promote well-being. Simply bringing your attention back to your breath and focusing on it is a proven technique for staying present in the moment.

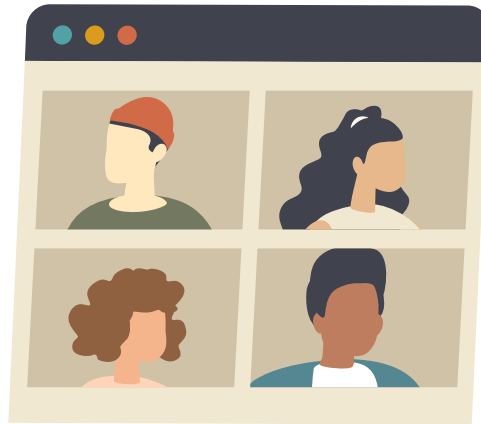


STAY CONNECTED

Having a baby is a life-changing event for you and those around you. It's very important to have emotional support after the birth. Unfortunately, physical distancing means encounters with family and friends are limited during this important period of your life.

Adjustments are necessary on all sides to make sure that you receive the concrete support you need right now. In these circumstances, it's normal to feel lonely or even angry. It's important to have emotional support after the birth of your baby.

But despite the current situation, maintaining **frequent contact** with your loved ones is vital. There are a number of technologies or apps that can help you do this.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Pay attention to the emotions you experience and feel free to share them with someone you trust. Don't aim for perfection during this new stage in your life. Build on your strengths, understand your limits and make choices that balance your well-being with that of your family.

LIMIT YOUR EXPOSURE TO NEWS

While it's important to stay informed, overexposure to alarmist news reports can increase stress. Limit the amount of time you spend accessing the news and get information from reliable sources (Government of Canada, World Health Organization, Government of Quebec, etc.).

Some of your family and friends may tend to talk obsessively about the pandemic. If this is a source of anxiety for you, ask them to keep these conversations to a minimum.



MATERNITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Even under normal circumstances, women experience many physical, psychological and social changes during pregnancy and the postpartum period. All of these changes make women more vulnerable to mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

THE BABY BLUES OR POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

After childbirth, pregnancy hormones drop dramatically. In addition, the fatigue and lack of sleep that occur naturally during the days and weeks following your child's birth can be exhausting.

You can go from laughter to tears in a few moments without really understanding why. You may feel depressed, have mood swings or feel overwhelmed by events.

This is a completely normal and temporary process, although you may be surprised by the mood changes it causes. This period of depression is temporary. It occurs in the days following birth and can last from a few days to two weeks.

WHEN THE BLUES DRAG ON...

If this temporary depression lasts for more than two weeks, and you continue to feel worse, sadder and more irritable, you may be experiencing postnatal depression.

You're not alone. Nearly one in four mothers who recently gave birth report feelings consistent with postpartum depression. Postnatal depression is quite common and can appear from two weeks to a year after birth, affecting up to one in five women.

Symptoms of postnatal depression vary. They include:

- Feeling sad and/or irritable
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Drop or increase in appetite
- Insomnia or increased need for sleep
- Extreme fatigue, loss of energy, feeling overwhelmed
- A sense of worthlessness or guilt (feeling like a bad mother, difficulty bonding with your child)
- Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts

In addition to being painful for the new mother, postnatal depression can have consequences for the child and for the couple. For these reasons it's important to not hesitate to ask for help. There is no shame in depression, and it can happen to anyone.

If you're not well, talk to a health care professional.

Your spouse or a family caregiver can also provide valuable support after childbirth and can be especially helpful if you think you may be experiencing depression, or the baby blues.

Tips for promoting your well-being during physical distancing

- Get remote support: talk to family and friends by phone, text messages and apps like FaceTime, Skype, etc.
- Make time for yourself
- Do fun activities; go outdoors
- Ask loved ones who don't live with you for help with things that don't require contact: meal preparation, walking your dog, etc.
- Have family and friends do your shopping and errands: groceries, drugstore, etc.

RESOURCES

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOU DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY

GENERAL RESOURCES

In order to provide support to women and those who accompany them throughout pregnancy and the postnatal period in general, the following resources can be helpful:

- From Tiny Tot to Toddler: a practical guide for parents from pregnancy to age two ([web version](#))
- Quebec perinatal resource centres
- Family resource centres
- Perinatal organizations
- Community breastfeeding resources
- Institut national de santé publique du Québec: www.inspq.qc.ca/information-perinatale

With the pandemic, organizations are offering alternative services, such as information videos or internet-based workshops, to prepare for childbirth.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The current situation is unusual. It may be difficult for you to think about anything other than COVID-19 or you may be isolating yourself more than necessary. The emotions and stress that the pandemic generates can mean that you need extra support. There is absolutely no shame in this.

If you need extra support, you can:

- Talk about your emotions and what you are going through with your spouse or significant other
- Discuss this with your health care professional (telemedicine allows some professionals to provide consultations remotely)
- Contact the Info-Santé and Info-Social line by dialing 811
- Contact the reception desk of your CISSS or CIUSSS
- Get in touch with aid agencies that are there for you - the 211 (www.qc.211.ca/en/) telephone line is a source of information for your neighbourhood organizations.

In an emergency, call 911.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The health care professional or midwife who is monitoring your pregnancy can answer your questions. Staff at the hospital or birthing home can also help you. The CLSC perinatal staff is also available to answer your concerns by phone or during a home visit.

The following resources can provide additional information:

- CHU Sainte-Justine: chusj.org
- CHU de Québec–Université Laval : [Childbirth](#)
- CIUSSS de l’Estrie – CHUS : [Pregnancy, Birth and Newborn](#)
- Integrated Health and Social Services University Network for West-Central Montreal : [Pregnancy, Childbirth and Newborns](#) and [Jewish General Hospital’s Family Birthing Centre](#)
- McGill University Health Centre : muhc.ca
- Montréal West Island Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre : [Pregnancy and Perinatal Services](#)
- [Digital tool Getting Better My Way](#), from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
- The Government of Quebec: [Pregnancy, delivery and the postnatal period during the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)
- [The Government of Quebec](#)

In addition, public health authorities in different regions are reliable sources of information on COVID-19.

