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Pregnancy and the COVID-19 Pandemic - FAQ

1. Are pregnant women at increased risk of becoming infected with COVID-19?

While pregnant women are considered a vulnerable or at-risk group, they do not appear to be more severely unwell if they do develop COVID-19 infection than the general population. Instead we expect that the majority of pregnant women will experience only mild to moderate cold/flu like symptoms.

However given the recency of the virus detailed information regarding the impact of COVID-19 infection on pregnant women and their babies is still limited. For this reason pregnancy advice is also based on what we know from influenza infection and our learnings from the SARS epidemic. A number of changes occur to a woman's body during pregnancy including reduced lung function, increased cardiac output, increased oxygen consumption, and changes to the immune system increasing the risk of severe complications from influenza.

2. Is there an increased risk of miscarriage with COVID-19?

No, there is no evidence at this stage to suggest an increased risk of miscarriage with COVID-19.

3. Can I transmit the virus to my baby while I am pregnant?

There have been a handful of very recent case reports suggesting that the virus may pass from the mother to the baby (vertical transmission). However, this is very early, preliminary data and has not been confirmed.

So far there is no evidence that developing COVID-19 during pregnancy will result in harm to your baby. We do know that some babies born to women with symptoms of COVID-19 in China have been born prematurely, however it is unclear whether coronavirus was the causative factor, or the doctors made the decision for the baby to be born early because the woman was unwell.

4. Can I still go for my routine antenatal check ups?

Routine antenatal investigations, ultrasounds and check-ups continue as before, allowing for the modifications suggested below.

5. What is our practice doing to minimise the risk of COVID-19?

We are asking that all patients with cold and flu symptoms inform our admin staff on booking or checking in; this allows us to direct unwell patients to a separate waiting area to keep well and unwell patients apart.

You may notice that doctors are wearing masks and gloves for consults and are wiping down surfaces and equipment between patients.

Both practices are offering appointments on Saturday mornings if this suits better and we are also offering phone and/or video telehealth consults where appropriate for things like results (with a medicare rebate).

Info correct as of Sunday 29 March 2020

At other times though we will still need to see you i.e. for blood pressure check, measure and to listen to the baby's heart beat. Your doctor will advise you but if you have any concerns at all about coming in please give us a call and we can discuss.

6. Should I still attend for my whooping cough and flu shot?

While it will not influence response to COVID-19 infection, routine whooping cough (from 20 weeks) and influenza vaccination should continue to be administered in pregnancy. Both of these are provided by the Government to you during pregnancy; there is no out of pocket cost for these vaccinations.

Whooping cough and influenza vaccination for your partner and close family is also important and something we can organise.

Unfortunately, no vaccination is currently available for COVID-19.

7. Can I still give birth in a hospital if I am diagnosed with COVID-19 infection?

Yes definitely. However you will likely find that your hospital has in place some protocols and restrictions in place to help keep patients and staff safe. This includes things like limiting the number of birth support people and visitors to the ward so we would recommend checking with your hospital / midwife to allow preparation.

8. Can I still breastfeed if I am diagnosed with COVID-19 infection?

Yes. At the moment there is no evidence that the virus is carried in breastmilk.

9. How can I prevent getting COVID-19 infection?

- Hand washing regularly and frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol based hand rub is an acceptable alternative
- Avoidance of anyone who is unwell, particularly coughing or sneezing
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Social-distancing and reducing general community exposure and use of public transport
- Avoid all non-essential travel
- Work from home if possible
- Seek early review of any symptoms – see below
- If your partner has COVID-19, or is symptomatic, they should not accompany you to appointments

9. What should I do if I become unwell?

If you develop cold/flu symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, difficulty breathing) please call us or your care provider to arrange an urgent medical review and consideration of COVID-19 testing. This may be initially done via telehealth followed by a face to face consultation if required.

10. What to do if you feel anxious about COVID-19

It's completely understandable to feel concerned about how the coronavirus will affect your own health as well as that of your baby, your wider family and other loved ones.

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia (PANDA) has suggested the following that may help to reduce stress and anxiety:

- Practice self care such as eating well, taking time out for yourself, engaging in hobbies that bring you joy
- Practice mindfulness
- Engage in physical activity
- Ask for help - this might be from family, friends, a health professional such as a GP or psychologist or any of the services listed below

Monday – Friday, 9am – 7.30pm AEST/AEDT

Lifeline Telephone and online chat support - [13 11 14](tel:131114)

Beyond Blue Telephone and online chat support - [1300 22 4636](tel:1300224636)

Suicide Call Back Service Telephone and online counselling - [1300 659 467](tel:1300659467)

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline Speak to a maternal child health nurse - [1800 882 436](tel:1800882436)

Gidget's National Telehealth Program for Families Experiencing Perinatal Depression and Anxiety - [1300 851 758](tel:1300851758)

11. Where can I access up to date information?

Obstetric updates and advise:

The Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists provides the most up to date Australian guidelines on COVID-19 and pregnancy - <https://rancog.edu.au/>

www.rcog.org.uk/coronavirus-pregnancy - UK site

General COVID updates and advise:

www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus

References

The Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. (2020, March 29). *A Message for Pregnant Women and Their Families*. Retrieved from <https://rancog.edu.au/statements-guidelines/covid-19-statement/information-for-pregnant-women>

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia. *Managing Emotional Wellbeing for Expecting and New Parents Affected By Natural Disasters, Global Crises or Concerns for the Future*. Retrieved from <https://www.panda.org.au/info-support/managing-emotional-wellbeing-in-expecting-and-new-parents-affected-by-natural-disasters-global-crises-or-concerns-for-the-future>