

Patient Education

COVID-19 and Pregnancy Discharge Instructions

You must carefully read the "Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer" below in order to understand and correctly use this information

About this topic

Coronavirus disease 2019 is also known as COVID-19. It is a viral illness that infects the lungs. It is caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Doctors do not know a lot about how COVID-19 affects pregnancy. They also do not know if you can pass it along to your baby while you are still pregnant. You may be at a higher risk for having your baby early. Babies who are born too early can have serious health problems.

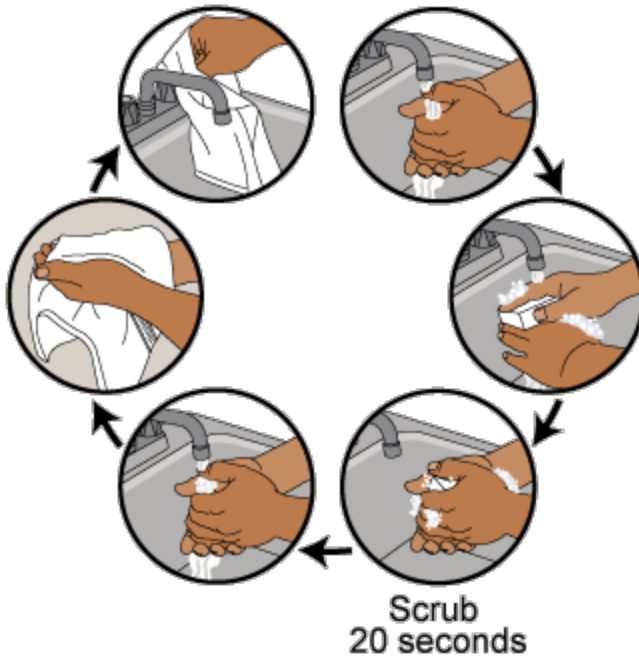
The signs of COVID-19 are like the flu, but can be much more serious. You may have a cough, fever, shaking chills, and it may be hard to breathe. You may be very tired, have muscle aches, a headache, or sore throat. Some people have an upset stomach or loose stools. Others lose their sense of smell or taste. You may not have these signs all the time and they may come and go while you are sick.

The virus spreads easily through droplets when you talk, sneeze, or cough. You can pass the virus to others when you are talking close together, singing, hugging, sharing food, or shaking hands. Doctors believe the germs also survive on surfaces like tables, door handles, and telephones. However, this is not a common way that COVID-19 spreads. Doctors believe you can also spread the infection even if you don't have any symptoms, but they do not know how that happens. This is why keeping people apart is one of the best ways to slow the spread of the virus.

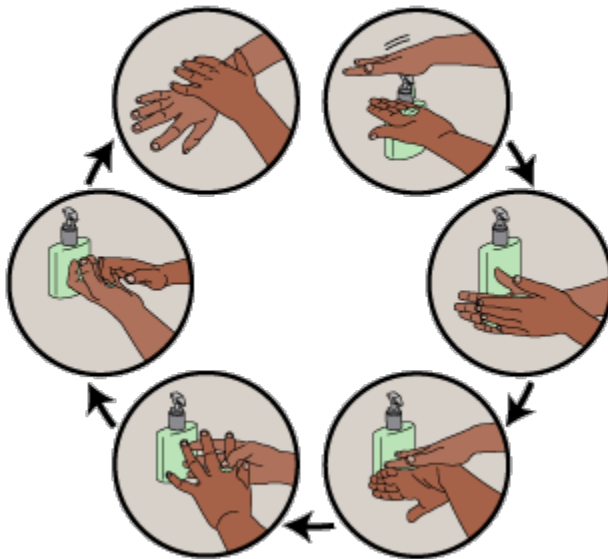
Some people have a mild case of COVID-19 and are able to stay at home until they feel better. Your doctor may watch you more closely if you are sick and pregnant. Some people may need to be in the hospital if they are very sick. People with COVID-19 must isolate themselves. You can start to be around others when your doctor says it is safe to do so.

Image(s)

Hand Washing



Hand Sanitizing



What care is needed at home?

- Ask your doctor what you need to do when you go home. Make sure you ask questions if you do not understand what the doctor says.

- Staff may ask you to wear a mask over your mouth and nose when you are in labor. You may also need to wear a mask when you hold your baby. Sometimes, you may not be able to hold or be around your baby until you are feeling better.
- Drink lots of water, juice, or broth to replace fluids lost from a fever.
- You may use cool mist humidifiers to help ease congestion and coughing.
- Use 2 to 3 pillows to prop yourself up when you lie down to make it easier to breathe and sleep.
- Do not smoke and do not drink beer, wine, and mixed drinks (alcohol).
- To lower the chance of passing the infection to others:
 - **Wear a mask over your mouth and nose if you are around others** who are not sick. Cloth masks work best if they have more than one layer of fabric.
 - Wear a mask over your mouth and nose when you feed your baby or pump breast milk for your baby.
 - Wash your hands often.
 - Stay home in a separate room, away from others. Only go out to get medical care.
 - Use a separate bathroom if possible.
 - Do not make food for others.
 - Use separate dishes, utensils, bedding, towels, and electronic devices.
 - Wipe down frequently touched objects often with disinfectant. These include things like doorknobs, light switches, remote controls, phones, keyboards, countertops, and tables.
 - Avoid contact with pets.
 - Avoid having visitors in the house.

What follow-up care is needed?

- Your doctor may ask you to make visits to the office to check on your progress. Be sure to keep these visits. Make sure you wear a mask at these visits.
- If you can, tell the staff you have COVID-19 ahead of time so they can take extra care to stop the disease from spreading.
- It may take a few weeks before your health returns to normal.

What drugs may be needed?

The doctor may order drugs to:

- Help with fever

Will physical activity be limited?

You may have to limit your physical activity. Talk to your doctor about the right amount of activity for you. If you have been very sick with COVID-19, it can take some time to get your strength back.

Will there be any other care needed?

Doctors do not know how long you can pass the virus on to others after you are sick. They also do not know if you can pass the virus on to your baby through your breast milk. You may want to have a healthy adult help with feeding your baby. If not, take extra care with good handwashing and wear a mask. Avoid touching your face, mouth, or eyes and avoid touching your baby's face, mouth, or eyes as well.

For now, doctors are giving general guidelines for you to follow after you have been sick. Before you go around other people, you should:

- Be fever free for 3 days without taking any drugs to lower your fever
- Have no symptoms of cough or shortness of breath
- Wait at least 10 days after you first have symptoms or your first positive test, and you also need to be symptom-free as above. Some experts suggest waiting 14 days.

Sometimes doctors will also want you to have 2 negative tests for COVID-19 at least 1 day apart. Doctors also do not know if you will be able to catch this virus again. Talk with your doctor about COVID-19 vaccines.

What problems could happen?

- Fluid loss. This is dehydration.
- Short-term or long-term lung damage
- Heart problems
- Death

When do I need to call the doctor?

- Signs of infection. These include a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, cough, more sputum, or change in color of sputum.
- Breathing is getting worse - harder or faster than before or you feel like you are getting less air
- Trouble breathing while lying down flat on your back
- You need to lean forward to help you breathe when sitting
- Fingertips, fingernails, skin, or lips are blue

Teach Back: Helping You Understand

The Teach Back Method helps you understand the information we are giving you. After you talk with the staff, tell them in your own words what you learned. This helps to make sure the staff has described

each thing clearly. It also helps to explain things that may have been confusing. Before going home, make sure you can do these:

- I can tell you about my condition.
- I can tell you what may help ease my breathing.
- I can tell you what I can do to help avoid passing the infection to my baby and others.
- I can tell you what I will do if I have trouble breathing; feel sleepy or confused; or my fingertips, fingernails, skin, or lips are blue.

Where can I learn more?

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

<https://www.acog.org/patient-resources/faqs/pregnancy/coronavirus-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding#How%20does%20COVID19%20affect%20pregnant%20women>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-and-pregnancy-and-childbirth>

Last Reviewed Date

2021-04-09

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer:

This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from your health care provider. This is only a brief summary of general information. It does NOT include all information about conditions, illnesses, injuries, tests, procedures, treatments, therapies, discharge instructions or life-style choices that may apply to you. You must talk with your health care provider for complete information about your health and treatment options. This information should not be used to decide whether or not to accept your health care provider's advice, instructions or recommendations. Only your health care provider has the knowledge and training to provide advice that is right for you.

Last Updated 6/3/21



© 2021 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.