



Renfrew County and District Health Unit

COVID-19: Pregnancy, Breastfeeding & Infant Care

There is limited information available about the effect of COVID-19 on pregnant women and babies. However, there is information about pregnancy and other respiratory viruses, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), which we can learn from.

What effect does COVID-19 have on pregnant women?

- Respiratory infections during pregnancy are a concern as pregnant women are more likely to have more serious symptoms and may need to be hospitalized.
- You can protect yourself by practicing [physical distancing](#) and avoid being exposed.
- Based on current information, there have been no cases where the mother has passed the virus to the baby during pregnancy and delivery.
- Some mothers have gone into early labour due to exposure to the virus.
- Women testing positive for COVID-19 should speak with their health care provider about their labour and delivery plan.
- Women testing positive for COVID-19 or who are suspected to have been exposed to COVID-19 should wear a mask and be isolated in a single-occupancy room during and after delivery.
- Only one visitor or support person may be allowed in the room during delivery.

Can I breastfeed if I've tested positive for COVID-19?

There is limited information about breastfeeding as it relates to COVID-19. In other coronavirus infections, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), the virus has not been detected in the breastmilk.

- As breastmilk protects against many illnesses, it is recommended that a mother with COVID-19 continue to breastfeed but take all [self-isolation](#) precautions and wear a face mask while breastfeeding to avoid spreading the virus to the infant.
- If you feel too unwell to breastfeed you can [hand express or pump](#) your milk at least eight times in 24 hours, including during the night, to maintain your breastmilk supply. Your expressed breastmilk may be fed to the baby from a cup, spoon or bottle by someone who is well.
- If expressing breastmilk by hand or with a manual or electric breast pump, you should put on a face mask and wash your hands thoroughly before touching any pump or bottle parts. Follow recommendations for proper pump cleaning after each use.
- If a bottle is used to feed expressed breast milk, ensure that it is properly [sterilized](#).

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- All caregivers must practice good hygiene measures, including handwashing and wearing a mask, before touching the baby, breast pump, or feeding bottles and equipment.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

I have tested positive for COVID-19 and have a new baby at home. What should I do?

Based on current information, infants and children do not appear to be at higher risk for getting COVID-19 than adults. Symptoms and complications of COVID-19 appear to be milder among infants and children compared with adults based on limited reports to date.

The best way to protect your baby is to take all [self-isolation](#) precautions and avoid exposing your baby to COVID-19.

- Before touching your baby, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Wear a face mask over your nose and mouth whenever you are near your baby.
- If possible, keep the infant's sleep surface at least six feet from your face.
- Ask a household family member who is not sick to help care for your baby.
- If you are breastfeeding, always wash your hands before touching the baby and wear a face mask while breastfeeding.
- If you sneeze or cough onto your uncovered chest, wash your breast area with soap and water before breastfeeding or pumping.
- If you have made an informed decision to feed your baby infant formula visit [Infant Formula: What You Need to Know](#). Remember, always wash your hands and wear a face mask while preparing formula and feeding the baby.

For more information:

- [Renfrew County and District Health Unit](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pregnancy, childbirth and caring for newborns: Advice for mothers](#)
- To speak with a public health nurse, contact the Health Unit at 613-732-3629.

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