

# Pregnancy and COVID-19

## A BLESSING IN DISGUISE?

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The COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted lives, and added emotional and financial stress to pregnant patients and their families. The virus, which originated in Wuhan, China, has rapidly spread across the globe, including to every state in the U.S.

Before COVID-19, there were no masks, no scary protocols, and no restrictions on visitors. A daunting picture that we never imagined for a pregnant woman. We are here to let you know that we are doing everything possible to ensure you have a safe and caring delivery experience. Rapid City OBGYN nurses and staff as well as those at the Monument Health Labor and Delivery Department are all making an extra effort to make this happen during these unprecedented times.

Is there a silver lining in this interesting time? We may be physically distant from one another, but we are finally talking to one another again. Whether it's our cell phone, Zoom, Skype, or Doxy.me, we are communicating. We are no longer making excuses to spend genuine time with one another.

We have temporarily altered our prenatal office visit schedule for safety and social distancing. Many of your clinic visits will be done via telehealth video to reduce exposure and to promote shelter in place recommendations. Most insurance companies recommend and will pay for Telehealth visits during the COVID-19 pandemic at no cost to you. Our patients are loving these virtual and convenient visits.

With that, we will still see you in the office for key points in the pregnancy such as the first obstetrical visit with dating ultrasound, and the mid-pregnancy 3D/4D anatomical ultrasound including fetal images which is always a neat experience to share.

In complicated pregnancies or emergencies, more in-person clinic visits will be necessary.

If an in-person visit is necessary, you will be asked to wear a mask and will be screened with a temperature check and questionnaire before entering the clinic. To reduce exposure, appointments are spaced out during the day to avoid crowds, clinic personnel will wear masks, and the room surfaces and equipment are disinfected between each patient.

When you go into labor, the delivery will be at Monument Health. In Rapid City, Monument Health has designated a special maternity entrance away from other patients on the west side of the hospital. You will be screened with a questionnaire and a temperature before entering the hospital.

To reduce the risk of becoming infected as your delivery date approaches, we are recommending that pregnant patients and their family stay at home for the last month of pregnancy. This will help ensure that you do not catch the virus and will allow you, your significant other, and your baby to have the best delivery experience possible including delayed cord clamping, skin-to-skin and bonding immediately following delivery. Monument Health has a rapid COVID-19 test available now, and soon our laboring patients will be offered a 1-hour rapid COVID-19 test before delivery.

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Mother-to-child transmission of coronavirus during pregnancy is unlikely, but after birth a newborn is susceptible to person-to-person spread. A positive COVID-19 status may result in separation of the newborn. The virus has not been detected in amniotic fluid, breastmilk, or other maternal samples. As COVID-19 has not been detected in breast milk, it can be expressed and then ideally your baby would then be fed by someone who is not infected. If you are COVID-19 positive and choose to directly breastfeed, then wear a facemask and wash your hands meticulously before each feeding.

As of the date of this article, there has not been a positive COVID-19 pregnant patient West River. We've been pleased to see increased compassion and caring attitudes from nursing staff and the

healthcare team towards our laboring patients during this crazy time with extra stress, and an overall better birthing experience.

Based on experiences and data collected in New York and Chicago, the CDC has changed the risk level for severe illness of pregnant patients and newborns from "high risk" to "low risk." In other words, pregnant women seem to have the same risk of severe illness from COVID-19 as adults who are not pregnant.

Although some pregnant mothers have contemplated homebirth to avoid COVID-19, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) states that homebirth is associated with a more than twofold increased risk of perinatal death (1-2 in 1000) and a threefold increased risk of neonatal seizures or serious neurologic dysfunction (0.4-0.6 in 1000). Weighing the risk-benefit-ratio, it is safer to deliver in the hospital setting rather than a homebirth setting during the pandemic. With an OBGYN specialist, you can be assured that you are making the best decision for a safe delivery and healthy newborn.

During this time, we need to get plenty of rest, hydrate well, eat healthy foods, exercise, spend time on hobbies, meditate, and spend time with those we love (sometimes virtually).

Delivery during a pandemic may be a blessing in disguise. The personal time you spend skin-to-skin and bonding with your perfect little guy or gal without being interrupted by visitors is a precious time. After going home, there are no school drop-offs or pickup's, or extracurricular activities for siblings to be shuffled to. For many patients, the family will be able to bond with your newborn, all day long, every day.

Although this wasn't what we ever imagined for any parent in this chaotic world right now, know that we will be OK, and we will get through this together. Look for the blessings that we've been given in this crazy life.



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