

Having a baby when you have or suspect you have COVID-19

Information to help you make decisions for you and your baby while you are in the hospital and for going home

The Ottawa Hospital has taken all possible precautions to create a safe and supportive environment for families having a baby during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is a new virus, which means that new information is continuously being produced. The following recommendations are based on the latest evidence from Canadian and international pediatric experts.

How is COVID-19 Spread?

Covid-19 is a respiratory virus that is spread when the respiratory droplets of an infected person contact the mucous membranes (eg. mouth, nose, eyes) of another person. This happens through close contact with an infected person (less than 6 feet for more than a few minutes).

There is no evidence that babies will get a COVID-19 infection through the birth process. However, babies can be infected by having contact with an infected person after birth. This means that moms who have COVID-19 can spread it to their baby through routine care.

Should mom care for baby, or an alternate healthy caregiver?

Newborns have immature immune systems which makes them at a higher risk of serious respiratory viral infections. There is some evidence that infants can suffer severe or life-threatening illness with COVID-19.

If you and your baby are well, there are two options for the care of your newborn while you are in hospital.

Option 1: Temporary separation of you and your newborn while you have COVID-19 or while you wait for your test results:

Nurses will care for your baby in a special nursery on the mother-baby ward OR your baby may be cared for in your room if there is a non-exposed, healthy caregiver available. This would have to be someone who **does not live with you** and has not seen you for 14 days. This person will have to wear protective equipment when they come within 6 feet of you (the health care team will help them prepare).

- If your baby stays in your room s/he will always need to stay 6 feet from your face so that your baby does not get infected.
- Your expressed breast milk or formula will be provided to the baby by the nurse or the non-exposed caregiver.

- Your baby will be discharged when you are discharged to a well, non-exposed caregiver (or to you if your COVID-19 test has come back negative).
- **We recommend that your baby stays with the non-exposed caregiver, either at their home, or in a separate room in your home, until you test negative for COVID-19. This could be approximately 2 weeks.**

The Ottawa Hospital Pediatric and Neonatal team recommends temporary separation from your newborn while you are COVID-19 positive or being investigated for COVID-19. We recognize that temporary separation of you and your newborn may be very hard on you, and we acknowledge that this may impact maternal-infant bonding, post-partum depression, and the establishment of breast feeding, especially with first time mothers. However, we feel separation will minimize the risk of your baby becoming infected after birth.

Option 2: Care by you in your room:

Your baby can be cared for by you, in your room, but you will need to take precautions during contact with your baby.

- You must wear a surgical mask at all times when touching your baby and at all times when the baby is less than 6 feet from your face.
- You should wash your hands very well with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer prior to all contact with your baby and avoid touching your face during contact with your baby.
- Your baby will be discharged home with you.
- **We then recommend that the precautions that were followed in hospital, including wearing a mask, be continued at home until you are negative for COVID-19. This could be about 2 weeks.**
- You must obtain your own masks to use at home.

What does having COVID-19 mean for Breastfeeding?

- Research on COVID-19 in breast milk is very limited, but to date evidence says COVID-19 is not passed through breastmilk.
- Breastmilk is the best source of nutrition for most infants.
- If you are pumping, you must wash your breasts carefully with soap and water prior to expressing your breast milk.

The Ottawa Hospital Pediatric and Neonatal team recommends that your baby receives your breast milk, either by breast feeding if you choose to care for your baby directly, or by pumping/expressing your milk to be fed to your baby by a non-exposed, healthy caregiver until you are negative for COVID-19. We recommend careful hand hygiene and washing your breasts carefully with soap and water prior to breast feeding or expressing breast milk.