

COVID-19: Outpatient Guidance for Maternity Patients

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to spread across the nation. Our understanding of the virus continues to evolve. When preparing for an increase in number of patients presenting with symptoms of COVID-19, it is important to consider the unique needs of pregnant Veterans. It is also important to note that VHA facilities do not routinely have infrastructure in place to care for obstetrical inpatients. Please see the updated guidance regarding the patients.

Triage of Pregnant Veterans and Coronavirus Testing

- Pregnant Veterans with mild or no symptoms of disease may be tested at VHA sites of care.
- Pregnant Veterans with severe symptoms are more appropriately managed in facilities in the community who have obstetrics capability.
 - If calling with severe symptoms, pregnant Veterans should be instructed to call their maternity provider and present to the local facility that has obstetrics capability
 - The Veteran's PCP should call the receiving facility to advise them that the pregnant patient with severe symptoms of disease is coming.
 - If a pregnant Veteran with severe disease is at a VHA facility, the goal should be to stabilize them and transfer them to a facility with obstetric capabilities.
 - Local facilities should have processes in place (sharing agreements, SOPs) to facilitate transfer.

How does coronavirus affect pregnancy and breastfeeding?

- There is currently little to no evidence that pregnant women have different symptoms or are at higher risk of severe illness.
- There is currently little to no evidence that mothers can transmit coronavirus to their babies before they are born or by breastfeeding.
- It is too early to know if there are risks to the fetus associated with coronavirus in the first trimester (such as fetal anomalies).

Guidance for Pregnant Veterans:

- Pregnant Veterans should follow the same infection-control guidance from CDC as non-Pregnant Veterans. This includes social distancing, handwashing, and wearing a mask in public spaces.
- Pregnant Veterans with symptoms should contact their PCP and maternity provider for advice.
- Pregnant Veterans diagnosed with COVID-19 must stay in close contact with their PCP and Maternity Provider and must notify their labor and delivery facility pending arrival.
- Veterans with newborns can take the following steps to avoid passing the infection to their baby:
 - Wash their hands before touching their baby.
 - Wear a face mask while breastfeeding if possible.
 - Wash their hands before touching any breast pump or bottle parts and clean all pump and bottle parts after use.
 - Someone who is not sick may feed their breast milk to their baby after they pump
- More information about pregnancy and breastfeeding is available from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists:
<https://www.acog.org/patient-resources/faqs/pregnancy/coronavirus-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>

The COVID-19 pandemic is straining local healthcare systems. Availability of maternity care providers and inpatient obstetric units may change or become limited.

- Pregnant Veterans can prepare by:

- Reaching out to their maternity care providers to get information about any changes in outpatient care or delivery related to COVID-19.
 - Obtaining a paper copy of their prenatal records and keeping it with them
 - Knowing the on-call or after-hours phone number of their maternity care providers
 - Staying in close contact with their Maternity Care Coordinator and notifying them of any illness or problems with the pregnancy
- Some pregnant Veterans may desire to transfer maternity care to a different provider or facility. They should know:
 - Transferring care, while possible, may result in delay in care. Appropriate transfer arrangements must be made through Office of Community Care.
 - Delivery at accredited birth centers is a covered benefit, but not all pregnant patients are candidates for birth center delivery (healthy, low-risk)
 - Home birth is not a covered maternity benefit and is associated with increased risks to the newborn. Emergency services such as ambulance and EMT may be less readily available in communities with high burden of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Pandemic places unique stresses on pregnant Veterans. These stresses are related to changing access to maternity care, concerns about having loved ones present during delivery, and concerns about the effects of COVID 19 on pregnancy and breastfeeding.

- Pregnant Veterans can help manage stress by:
 - Establishing routines, connecting online with friends, and doing physical activity as a means of coping.
 - Calling on their military disaster preparedness skills.
 - Using brief relaxation exercises to help relieve tension.
 - Using mindfulness apps like this one: [VA Mindfulness Coach phone app](#)
 - Veterans can find tips on parenting during the pandemic here: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips#6>.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has the potential to negatively impact those experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Pregnancy is a known risk factor for escalation of IPV.

- For Veterans experiencing IPV, any disruption to normal life or access to services can increase potential for harm.
- Restrictions have an outsized impact on safety of individuals experiencing IPV: school and childcare closures, access to public transportation, ability to report to work, being quarantined with a violent partner.
- Seeking assistance in hospitals, court houses and other public service agencies may also be limited.
- Resources for Veterans and their health care providers include:
 - [Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program \(IPVAP\) Coordinators](#) are continuing to offer services at VA facilities and through virtual technologies.
 - [IPV SharePoint](#) holds [IPV Awareness Toolkit](#), which has a [folder](#) that contains:
 - [IPV Staff Factsheet](#): Designed to provide information about the public health crisis, the relationship between the outbreak and IPV, and resources.
 - [IPV Patient Facing Factsheet](#): Provides information to those we serve. It provides information about risk, safety planning, and resources.