

Pregnancy Amidst Covid19 Pandemic

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The coronavirus disease 2019, which originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019, has now spread to over 200 countries [1] and has been declared a pandemic [2] by the World Health Organization. With over 2 million cases worldwide [1], COVID-19 is proving to be a public health crisis of immense magnitude. As a part of containment efforts, governments across the world have put into effect lockdowns in their countries. These lockdowns have greatly restricted public movement and aim to control further spread of the virus.

With COVID-19 spreading rapidly across the globe, our knowledge with regards to how the SARS-CoV-2 virus affects our body systems is evolving on a daily basis. Considering the total number of pregnancies is above 200 million annually [3], being pregnant amidst this pandemic is a cause for concern. With the physiological changes and immune compromised status, pregnant women represent a high-risk category for COVID-19. Also, information on illnesses associated with other coronaviruses (i.e. severe acute respiratory syndrome - SARS and the Middle East respiratory syndrome - MERS) might provide insights into coronavirus disease 2019's effects during pregnancy. Coronaviruses cause illness ranging in severity from the common cold to severe respiratory illness and death. Information regarding how the novel coronavirus 2019 affects maternal and fetal well-being is limited, however emerging data does seem to indicate that pregnant women are not at a higher risk of severe illness as compared to the general population [4]. This should not undermine the importance of taking proper precautions to protect themselves against COVID-19 amongst the pregnant population. Precautions to avoid COVID-19 infection in pregnant women should include:

- Washing hands frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub or simple soap and water
- Maintaining physical distance, avoiding crowded spaces and large gatherings
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Practicing respiratory hygiene
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces on a daily basis
- Limit visits to the doctor, if possible go for consultations via telehealth
- In case it is essential to venture outside, wear a face mask.

Apart from having to deal with the precautions related to contracting COVID-19, another important factor that pregnant women are having to face is the issue of social isolation. As governments across the world enforce lockdowns in their respective countries, the general population finds themselves confined to their homes. Concerns about contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus and altered hospital protocols regarding consultations may adversely affect the well-being of pregnant women. Pregnancy is an exciting time for most, it is however filled with uncertainty and doubts. The ongoing global pandemic, with its health and social implications, is further adding to stress and anxiety levels of pregnant females worldwide. Pregnant women are finding themselves in situations where they are having to deal with COVID-19 related fears and that too without their usual social support.

Symptoms in pregnant women that may indicate high levels of stress include:

- Changes in sleep pattern
- Changes in appetite
- Frequent feelings of fear and worry related to pregnancy and delivery
- Lack of concentration.

Some stress-relieving practices that pregnant women may follow in order to reduce their anxiety levels and enable them to have a healthier pregnancy in these testing times include:

- Mild exercise, meditating.
- Deep breathing and stretching exercises.
- Limit news time to once or twice a day, preferably morning and day-time.
- Try to keep evenings for leisurely activities such as reading, watching movies and playing board games. This will also help in staying relaxed before going to bed.
- Physical distance does not mean one has to socially isolate themselves. Keep in touch with friends and family via phone, video calls and other social media platforms.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Look for online support groups for pregnant women and new parents. This will provide you with a platform where you can discuss your issues and see how others are coping with the same.
- Ensure you get sufficient sleep by going to bed at a consistent time and limiting screen time prior to bedtime.

Use of Lifestyle Medicine Technology also can be of help in relieving stress and combating with anxiety [5]. Use of such technology is readily available in most of the smart phones and improve quality of life in pregnancy.

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