

# COVID-19: Perinatal Support

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Providing necessary care and social support is critical during the perinatal time period to ensure the health and well-being of parents and children. Due to concerns related to COVID-19, hospitals have limited the number of people who can be present during and following birth. There are also fewer opportunities for face-to-face meetings at follow-up pediatrics and obstetrics appointments following birth. These structural changes are resulting in reduced social support and may result in higher maternal and infant mortality due to under-identification of perinatal complications.

## PRENATAL

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [recommends](#) modifying or reducing prenatal visits during the COVID-19 crisis.
  - Among the general population, reducing the number of in-person visits and leveraging telehealth may reduce stress and does not adversely affect the mother or child.<sup>1</sup>
  - However, mothers at risk for negative pregnancy outcomes (e.g., mothers who use substances, smoke, or have a sexually transmitted infection) are generally less likely to receive adequate prenatal care and may be even less likely to receive care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The early identification of pregnancy among these mothers is important to reduce adverse birth outcomes.<sup>2</sup>
  - Alternative strategies should be used to identify pregnancy during COVID-19, especially for mothers with a higher likelihood of high-risk pregnancy. For instance, providing opportunities for screening at [syringe exchange programs](#).
- Pregnancy loss during COVID-19 may be particularly challenging for parents. When possible, partners should be allowed to be present during a miscarriage, similar to provisions for birthing, to reduce mothers' psychological distress.<sup>3</sup> Telehealth referrals to mental health care providers should be provided to mothers closely following pregnancy loss.

## BIRTH

- Having a support person present during birth, such as partners and doulas, is associated with improved infant outcomes and decreased likelihood of maternal depression.<sup>4</sup>
- The CDC recommends allowing one essential support person during birth when possible; however, some hospitals cannot allow any support persons due to the risk of transmitting COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> Medical professionals could benefit from receiving additional guidance on providing mothers social support during this time. Receiving postpartum care from a consistent care giver improves patient perceived support.<sup>4</sup>
- ACOG recommends expediting hospital discharge and using telehealth for follow-up appointments after birth.<sup>6</sup> Physicians may need additional training to successfully use telehealth modalities.

## EARLY POSTNATAL

- Special attention should be focused on providing social and medical support to women in the postpartum period to prevent additional complications.
- African American women<sup>7</sup> may be experiencing disproportionately heightened challenges due to COVID-19 and need additional support to promote their postnatal health and well-being. COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting African Americans<sup>8</sup> and African American women are already at greater risk for maternal mortality.<sup>9</sup>
- Electronic screeners for mental health concerns and physical concerns could be leveraged prior to visits to ensure the appointment is thorough.<sup>10</sup>

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