



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

PARENTS WITH NEWBORNS

Version 2, 4/20/20

Congratulations on your new family member! The last months have been filled with plans and preparations to bring home your baby. You may have already invited people to come meet your newest family member. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these plans now need to change so you can keep your baby safe from the virus.

There is still a lot for all of us to learn about how COVID-19 affects mothers and new babies. The medical and scientific communities are monitoring the situation and gathering information on this topic that will help us in the future. In some ways nothing has changed. Your number one job is to keep your newborn safe and healthy, which also means keeping yourself safe and healthy. Because of the COVID-19 virus, your job includes protecting your newborn from anyone who could have been exposed to virus. This new responsibility may feel frightening and even impossible. To protect yourself and your family, your birth and postpartum plans have likely had to change. Your family is likely having to go it alone since you probably are not allowing friends and family around the baby because they may unknowingly be infected by the virus. You also may be facing additional financial stresses, childcare and schooling responsibilities, and endless demands to juggle tasks for your family.

Isolation and loneliness are challenging enough for new parents, and the postpartum months are associated with increased risk for depression and anxiety symptoms. Physical (social) distancing guidelines and shelter in place policies make it harder to get support and encouragement. To help parents and their babies maintain their well-being, both physically and emotionally, here are some tips for your family. Additional resources are also included.

Engage in Best Practices to Keep Your Baby and Family Healthy

- Ask your obstetrician and pediatrician for the latest information on keeping your family and newborn safe and healthy
- Protect your family from COVID-19 by following the advice from the CDC

EMORY

 **Grady**

 **MOREHOUSE**
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



- Keep your distance from anyone outside the home
 - Do not allow your children to play with neighbors or school friends
 - Put off having people meet your new baby until after the pandemic is over
- Make sure everyone washes their hands any time they are going to touch the baby or any of the baby's supplies
- Ask people who come in from the outside to change their clothes before holding or touching the baby
- Use recommended cleaning materials (e.g., bleach, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, soap and water) to clean common surfaces like counters, computers, phones and any surfaces where things for the baby may be placed
- Show appreciation when you see others in your home using good hygiene practices
- Monitor and address illness symptoms in household members
 - Check all members of your household for symptoms of illness (fever, diarrhea, fatigue, red eyes, cough) each day
 - Contact your healthcare providers if any family member develops concerning symptoms
- Keep track of your own health
 - Contact your healthcare provider immediately if you feel ill
 - Stay in a separate room from your newborn if you feel ill until your symptoms have passed, and your healthcare provider says you are safe to come in contact with your newborn

Follow Current Infant Feeding Guidelines

- Keep up to date with the CDC's latest [guidelines](#) for breast and bottle feeding during COVID-19
- Remember that when it comes to feeding your infant, "Fed is best" - no awards are given for feeding your baby in a particular way; breast feeding, pumping and feeding or formula feeding all have their benefits
- Make a choice about how you feed your baby based upon input from healthcare professionals caring for you or your baby, your baby's preferences, and your preferences



- Do what is best for you and the baby
- Reach out to your obstetrician practice to determine if a lactation consultant can do a video visit with you, if you are trying to breastfeed but find it harder than you expected, or if you simply have questions
- Wear a face mask while breast or bottle feeding if you have questions about your own exposure to the coronavirus

Accept Changes in Social Support and Visitation Plans

- Let those around you know that you are doing your best to keep baby and everyone else in your family safe and healthy
 - Remind them, this means no contact with baby in baby's first few weeks and months, even from your baby's grandparents
- Focus on what is in your baby's best interest
 - Recognize that it is understandable that family members and close friends may be upset when you prevent them from seeing the new baby and remind them you will let them spend time with the baby as soon as the pandemic is over
 - Be consistent and do not show favoritism about who can visit – this will be safer for the baby and fewer people will feel hurt or angry
- Consider scheduling time for loved ones to meet your baby or watch your baby play or sleep via video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime, Skype)
 - Start this tradition now and over time, it will afford loved ones, including those who live far away, more time with the child
- Encourage people who want to help to do so in creative ways, such as sending meal delivery gifts, online retail gift cards, or making runs to the store for supplies
- Accept that these changes are not ideal but are in the best interest of the entire family
- Enjoy getting to know your baby
 - Capitalize on this time to become acquainted and bond with your new family member

Maintain a Calm, Reassuring, and Loving Approach toward Your Partner

- Check in daily with your partner about how you both are feeling and coping and provide reassurance as appropriate



- Acknowledge your partner’s worries and fears, as well as your own
- Recognize your own emotional responses to COVID-19 and how your reactions may affect your partner
- Be patient with your partner
 - Strive to be kind and understanding
 - Apologize when you lose your cool
 - Accept your partner’s apology when they offer one.
- Show your partner (or co-parent or friend) little acts of love and kindness every day
 - Provide them extra comfort and support during this stressful time
- Take advantage of the opportunity to take turns caring for your newborn, as it is likely that both caregivers are home more than usual during this time

Attend to Your Own Mental Wellness

- Remember that being “good enough” is all that is required of you right now - you are not expected to be perfect
- Remind yourself that your priorities are your baby’s health and your own health, and everything else is extra
- Be aware of your own emotions by taking your “emotional temperature” at least once each day (e.g., first thing in the morning or before bed) or twice each day when you monitor your physical temperature for COVID-19 related fever
 - Imagine a thermometer from 0 to 100 degrees, with 100 degrees being the most overwhelmed you have ever felt
 - Determine a temperature for yourself that indicates that you are too stressed out and need more assistance
- If you become overwhelmed or frustrated, it is perfectly fine to hand your baby to a partner or set them down in a safe place for a minute or two to give yourself time and space to reset
- Know when to seek professional support (e.g., feel sad or empty most days for at least two weeks, blame yourself constantly and unnecessarily when things go wrong)
- Practice self-care; we know this is easier said than done!
 - Try to schedule a bit of time just for you while your baby sleeps or your partner caregives
 - Take your baby outside (somewhere that you can maintain a safe distance



from others) for a few minutes every day for a short walk or to sit in the sunshine

- Allow yourself time to rest and try your best to sleep when your baby sleeps
- Nourish your body adequately
- Showers are good ways to relax and can improve your mood
- Schedule activities that do not involve screen time or technology during your down time

Stay Socially Connected

- Schedule virtual gatherings with family and friends, or other new moms, to have some structured time to check in with those who understand your needs and your situation the best
- Consider joining virtual chat rooms, reading mommy blogs or listening to new parent or parenting podcasts judiciously, which may offer some comfort and help you feel more connected and supported during this time

Watch How Much Time You Are Spending with the News and Social Media

- Monitor your exposure to media about the virus
 - Stay informed but do not seek out information constantly
- Be aware of what you are exposed to and how it emotionally impacts you
- Limit the amount of time you spend consuming COVID-19-related media, and ensure that you are also attending to media topics other than COVID-19

Develop New Routines

- Create a routine and structure for the day
 - Incorporate input from all family members
 - Remember to incorporate all of your own needs as well
- Strive to have all of baby's caregivers provide input regarding the schedule
- Recognize that the routine needs to be flexible
- Write the routine down somewhere in the home for all to see
- Generate a plan with your family for how to maintain your routine if you or another caregiver becomes ill



Helpful Resources

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention's ["Pregnancy and Breastfeeding FAQs"](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics ["Management of Infants Born to Mothers with COVID-19"](#)
- March of Dimes [online support communities](#)
- March of Dimes ["Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\): What you need to know about its impact on moms and babies"](#) (includes Facebook group)
- The 4th Trimester Project's [COVID for New Mom's resources](#)
- Can Do Kiddo's ["Stay at Home Infant and Toddler Schedule" guide](#)
- Kelly Mom [articles related to COVID-19 and new motherhood](#)