

COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH: CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXPECTANT AND NEW PARENTS.

The stress of any kind can have adverse effects on overall human wellbeing, and this can be especially challenging when addressing the new lifestyle transitions that come with having a baby. Expecting parents want to do their best to ensure that pregnancies are as healthy as they can be.

Current circumstances around COVID-19 pandemic compound the usual stressors with uncertainties that can be quite troubling. However, being self-aware and doing things to reduce the risk while managing the unsettling thoughts and worries can be just what expecting and new parents need right now.

Below are a few tips that may help individuals and family members cope with these unusual circumstances.

Stress and anxiety during pregnancy:

1. Expecting parents can rely on their primary health care provider for up-to-date information and things they may need to do differently in light of COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Currently, healthy pregnancy is not considered a high-risk condition, therefore expecting parents should be taking the same precautions as others regarding work responsibilities, following Health Canada guidance.
3. It is, however, very important to consider emotional safety, and if an individual finds oneself more worried than usual, then opting to be safe at home might be the best decision at this time.
4. The evidence so far indicates that pregnancy does not leave expecting parents at a higher risk for contracting or experiencing more severe symptoms of COVID-19. Refer to the [Health Canada](#) for more information.
5. Expecting parents can consult with their health care provider regarding things that they need to monitor at home, i.e., baby movement, their symptoms regarding energy level, sudden weight gain or loss, water retention, fatigue, breathing, etc. A provider can help them feel more comfortable by learning what to expect.
6. Individuals should be advised to stay connected as much as they need; to friends, community supports and loved ones. Take advantage of “facetime” dates as appropriate during COVID-19 pandemic, and other online activities.
7. Staying active and going outside safely distanced from others is shown to be very beneficial to one’s mental health.
8. Breathing, stretching, participating in mindful movements and practices can help expecting parents focus their thoughts and take them away from worries and “what if’s” that they do not know the answer to.
9. It is recognized that not all pregnancies are planned and celebrated. Extra effort to stay connected and supported is especially important at this time. It is also known that domestic violence may also increase during pregnancy, which adds a significant complication to the “stay at home” guidance. Community supports vary, but a primary care provider can guide expecting parents to the supports that they may find helpful. The local public health unit can be a safe

place to call and also connect to culturally sensitive supports. To locate your local public health unit, visit this webpage:

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>

10. Parents can also reach out to *Telehealth Ontario* at Toll-free: 1-866-797-0000 or Toll-free TTY: 1-866-797-0007.

Considerations for after the baby comes:

1. Parents can discuss with the health care provider options for their support people in preparation for the birth and after. For example, if grandparents remain in isolation and symptom-free for 14 days, it may be possible for them to provide some in-person love, respite, and support. Parents may not have to do this all alone.
2. Parents should also be encouraged to continue to use facetime and online platforms to find parental support, group activities, and to stay connected to family and friends.
3. It is important to remember that there will be more quiet and uninterrupted time for just parents and their new family that they may very well appreciate. This will help with bonding, breastfeeding and reducing the pressure to tidy and prepare for entertaining guests.
4. Also, parents should be reminded that this will be temporary. It's important to stay aware, but also to give themselves a break from the news once in a while, as constant distressing information can be overwhelming. Now, more than ever, it is necessary for a new family to be in the moment, and start learning, loving and bonding with one another.
5. Practicing [Mindfulness](#) and gratitude really works! There are many guided practices available, with some online options. Parents can reach out to community mental wellness supports as needed.

Finally, transitioning to parenthood can leave some individuals feeling isolated. Childbirth involves a lot of physical, emotional, social and mental adjustments which can be both positive and challenging. Postpartum depression also can leave parents feeling lonely, so it's important to watch for signs and symptoms and to know when and whom to reach out to if there are concerns. The first stop for all health-related issues (including mental health) would be the family's primary health care provider. However, [The Canadian Mental Health Association](#) is also a very valuable and insightful resource, which can be shared with new parents.

For additional information and questions, please contact: Angela Geddes CYW, BA (Psych), MSW, RSW – FASD Family and Caregiver Support Group Project Coordinator at a.geddes@healthnexus.ca.

References:

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Telehealth Ontario.

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