



COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus 2019)

Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology

To our pregnant patients and families,

We understand this is a very stressful time for you and your family. First, we want to thank you for trusting us with your health care needs. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at The GW Medical Faculty Associates is closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus) and is coordinating with the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and DC public health officials to take every precaution to prepare us to provide safe evidenced based maternity care to all of our patients, including those who may present with COVID-19.

COVID-19 is an evolving pandemic and as of March 12, 2020 and there is little known about the effect of the virus on pregnant women and infants. As of now, there is no data to suggest that pregnant women are at higher risk of complications with the disease. Likewise, there is no evidence yet to suggest an increase risk to unborn babies of mothers who are infected with the virus. A small case series reported in [The Lancet](#) found no evidence of vertical transmission from pregnant individuals to their infants. There was no evidence of virus in the amniotic fluid, cord blood, or breastmilk of women with known cases of COVID-19. We don't yet know about the effect of the virus in the first trimester.

The number of cases continues to grow rapidly worldwide and the situation remains fluid as public health authorities assess and attempt to prevent the spread of infection. For current information about the total number of confirmed cases in the United States, visit the [CDC website](#).

What are coronaviruses?

The cause of this outbreak has been identified as a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), or COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause symptoms ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory illness. Other coronaviruses include severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). The MFA has substantial experience evaluating and caring for patients with high risk viral infections.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Coronaviruses are typically spread from person-to-person when in close contact. Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how the flu spreads.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

What are the symptoms of an COVID-19 infection?

For confirmed COVID-19 infections, reported illnesses have ranged from people with little to no symptoms or mild cold symptoms to people being severely sick. Most people who become sick from COVID-19 — approximately 80 percent — do not require hospitalization.

Common symptoms of a COVID-19 infection may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Chest tightness or chest pain
- Shortness of breath

Persons who are elderly, unable to develop a normal immune response, or have other comorbidities, such as heart disease or liver disease, are at higher risk of developing severe pneumonia and dying from the disease. Symptoms of the coronavirus may appear in as few as two days or up to 14 days after exposure, according to the CDC.

How is The GW Medical Faculty Associates preparing and responding to COVID-19?

A multidisciplinary team of health care providers, administrative leaders, and support staff that have been preparing to care for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 since we first learned of the outbreak in late January. We have taken every precaution to ensure that we can provide all patients, including those with possible COVID-19, with the highest quality care while protecting hospital staff, other patients and visitors. A number of proactive efforts are underway across our health system, including activities related to:

- Updating our Emergency Department and ambulatory screening protocols to rapidly detect patients with possible COVID-19. Patients and visitors will be screened for infection before entering the clinic or hospital.
- Regularly updating providers about the status of the outbreak and our evolving understanding of the biology of this disease.
- Implementing a robust training program on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment.
- Planning for the potential influx of a large number of COVID-19 patients
- Canceling routine well woman appointments and elective surgeries and procedures to minimize risk to healthy women and to decrease the risk of community exposure for vulnerable women needing care.
- For pregnant patients, we are carefully considering how to reduce community exposure by reducing on-site prenatal care visits when medically appropriate

- Limiting the number of visitors allowed to accompany patients to appointments and to the hospital. Please the visitor guidelines below.
- We have increased our providers available for phone consultation and triage. We encourage you to seek phone consultation and triage when able to reduce community exposure.

How is the MFA Communicating with patients?

Good channels of communication are essential during this pandemic. We are strongly encouraging all of our patients to enroll in our Follow-my-Health app and use it to communicate questions and concerns. We also are encouraging all of our patients to enroll in the [Babyscripts](#) app at your next appointment. We will be sending important updates and instructions to you through [Babyscripts](#).

As with any infectious disease we are deploying strict precautions (airborne, contact and eye protection) for those with possible COVID-19. This includes patients with:

- Fever or symptoms of lower-respiratory illness (including coughing or trouble breathing)
- Recent travel from countries where COVID-19 outbreaks have been reported
- Contact with a known or suspected case of COVID-19

In terms of visitors on our labor and delivery units, we already have protocols in place to limit visitation by people with influenza-like illnesses or respiratory symptoms unless they are the designated support person. In addition, throughout our clinic sites and hospital, the following visitation guidelines are in effect:

- Individuals who are sick, have a fever or a confirmed case of COVID-19 should not visit or accompany patients. Patient and visitors will be screened with health questions and temperature checks.
- Patients are restricted to two people with them on L&D. This includes a labor support professionals such as a doula. After delivery, there may only be 1 person with patients overnight on out postpartum unit and up to 2 visitors between 12Pm and 6PM
- Visitors must be age 18+.
- Visitors can speak with a caregiver about exceptions and special circumstances.
- No visitors are allowed from 10p-8a, unless accompanying a newly-admitted patient.
- Visitors must wash their hands – or use hand sanitizer – before and after leaving rooms and hospital.
- All visitors (including doulas) should enter GW Hospital through the lobby at all times of day.

How can I protect myself and others from COVID-19?

The CDC recommends these everyday actions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough, or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash. Then wash your hands with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

The best way to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses is to:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes or nose with unwashed hands
- Stay home and do not travel when you are sick
- If you have not yet had a flu shot, we are still encouraging you to do so. We are still seeing cases of influenza. This is an avoidable risk and symptoms often are similar to COVID-19

Should I wear a face mask?

The CDC is not recommending that people wear masks. Most often respiratory viruses are spread from person-to-person in close contact or within six feet of each other.

To preserve the limited supply of masks, only MFA staff who provide direct care to patients with communicable illnesses or patients with a fever or cough are wearing masks. For more information about masks, see the [CDC's webpage on respirators](#).

What else can I do?

During this stressful time it is important to take good care of yourself. This includes a healthy diet, regular exercise, and plenty (7-9 hours) of sleep. Stay connected with your family and friends through Facetime and social media. Please reach out us if you are feeling depressed or anxious.

Where can I go for up-to-date information?

Facts about COVID-19, situation updates and travel guidance can be found at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention coronavirus website](#).

Please visit our website for the most recent information and updates related to COVID-19 at The GW Medical Faculty Associates at: GWDocs.com/Coronavirus.