

Doulas & COVID-19

A TOOLKIT FOR DOULAS

UPDATED JANUARY 2022



What's Included in this toolkit?

LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

- Facts about COVID-19
- How doulas can continue to support their clients
- Doula Dos
- Impacts to doulas
- Tips for attending births and postpartum visits
- How to protect YOURSELF
- Additional resources and informative links

Facts about COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are common in humans and animals. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread easily from person to person. Symptoms range from mild to severe and may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms of human coronaviruses may be very mild or more serious and may vary by variant, such as:

- Fever
- Cough/difficulty breathing
- Headaches
- Sniffles/flu-like symptoms

How does COVID-19 Spread?

Coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person through respiratory droplets and aerosols when they cough or sneeze. These can remain in the air after the person has left the room and do pose a risk even at distances greater than 6 feet. You should also know close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands, and/or touching something with the virus on it then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands or splashes and sprays directly to mucous membranes are also risky.



How doulas can support their clients

TALK TO YOUR CLIENTS



- Use a non-fear inducing approach. Make this a normal part of the conversation, and be mindful to not invoke panic. Be gentle. This is a stressful situation, especially for those welcoming a new baby. Understand you may need to do prenatals and postpartums remotely via video conferencing apps such as Skype, Zoom & Google Hangouts.
- Ask clients how they are preparing; use open-ended questions so that you can gauge their level of preparedness and anxiety. Acknowledge that though it may be uncomfortable to discuss, the goal is to help people be as safe as possible.

STAY LOCALLY UPDATED



Keep abreast of the local situation in your area and specifically what your public health department is suggesting/recommending. Use only reputable information sources such as the CDC or the WHO.

DISCUSS THE WHAT-IFS



Help your clients work through the various scenarios that may occur, if that is helpful to them, especially if there is a possibility that your presence may be restricted by hospital policies or quarantine recommendations. Discuss what might help them feel more prepared and remember that we can only control what we can control. The public health measures are meant to protect all of us. There are also advocacy measures that you can take to help all of your clients. See the DONA Advocacy Toolkit for more information.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER DOING NOW TO PREPARE?



Learn and use appropriate infection control protocols, including washing your hands with soap and hot water for 20 seconds or more regularly and anytime there is visible dirt on them. Clean your hands with alcohol-based sanitizer before going INTO a room and before LEAVING a room. Practice social distancing and strive for good ventilation such as open windows when possible.



Learn about the usage of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as: gloves, face masks (N95/KN95) or shields, and safety glasses. Common surgical masks are less effective. Cloth masks and gaiters provide no real protection. Vaccination is shown to lower infection rates, prevent severe disease, and death.



Ensure you have a reliable and healthy back-up doula to take over care for an extended period should the need arise (DONA recommends doulas ALWAYS have reliable back-up support). Sometimes layers of support are important. Understand that once you get to a birth, you may not be permitted to switch out with a backup doula; be prepared for a longer labor support experience.



Ensure your contract accounts for various types of emergent situations. For already executed contracts, speak with client about how to account for an emergency and consider adding an addendum to your contract.

Help your clients work through the various scenarios that may occur, if that is helpful to them, especially if there is a possibility that your presence may be restricted by hospital policies.



- Support clients at home as long as possible before they transfer to the hospital, then offer remote, virtual support through video conferencing apps such as Skype, Zoom or Google Hangouts.
- Consider alternative birth place options.
- Offer additional postpartum support in lieu of birth support.

How might this impact doulas?



Much was learned during the SARS outbreak and now hospitals around the globe are better prepared. We are confident that the majority of hospital systems recognize the valuable contribution doulas make in supporting families' wellbeing and positive birth outcomes. We also recommend doulas reach out to their hospitals proactively to ensure families can rely on their doula's support during their birth.

DONA has prepared a letter that can be sent to hospital administrators proactively.

Scenarios that we have seen in 2020-2022:

Limits during labor:

Some hospitals allow only one person during labor. Clients often chose their partner. This one support person may not interchangeable (for example, the partner could not spend one hour and alternate with a doula, friend, or family member). NOT recommended by AWHONN and others.

Limits immediately postpartum:

Some hospitals don't allow any support people during postpartum recovery. Some families may opt to leave early to be able to have support in the early days from others.

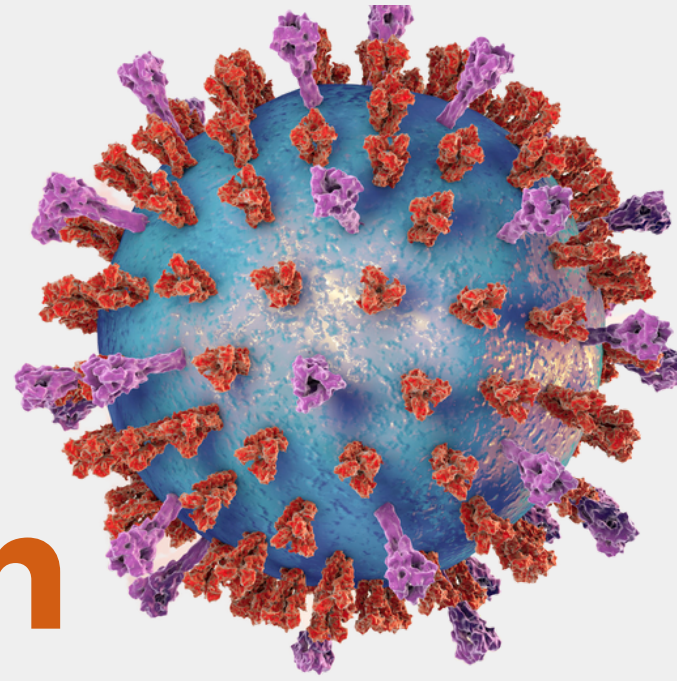
Restrictions on Doulas:

Some hospitals allow doulas with no restrictions. Others only allow one doula and no backup switch-outs. Some may require proof of training or certification. DONA offers provisional certification. See [DONA.org](https://dona.org)

Required health screenings and/or vaccinations:

Some places of birth require proof of vaccination status and/or testing. Have solid knowledge of your local testing centers, to include the types of testing offered (PCR v. antigen) and how long it takes for results to return.

Best practices when working with clients



What if I'm not feeling well?

If you have any of the symptoms of an illness (mentioned above) use a back-up doula and see your local health care provider (or as directed by your public health department) for treatment and testing.

Should I use a backup?

If you are not well, you should not attend the birth or postpartum visits. If your family members are not well, you should also consider utilizing your backup. You might want to consider hosting remote meetings via video conferencing apps such as Skype, Zoom or Google Hangouts.

How does social distancing play out in birth and postpartum?

Social distancing is a term applied to certain actions that are taken by Public Health officials to stop or slow down the spread of a highly contagious disease. It includes canceling large group activities, closing schools etc. People can implement social distancing practices individually in birth and postpartum by limiting extra visitors, being mindful of avoiding large crowds when they do go out and limiting exposure to anyone who shows symptoms of illness. Doulas can discuss plans with clients as they prepare for birth and postpartum by relying on the recommendations of public health officials. Avoid giving your own opinions or anecdotal recommendations. Let local, state, and global public officials guide the narrative. Being apart from friends and family in the postpartum can be difficult. There are signs that postpartum anxiety and depression are rising. (11) Postpartum doulas should be aware of the signs and have local resources available.

There are guidelines from the CDC that outline risks to pregnant people with Coronavirus and the risks to their pregnancy and baby.(6) Many hospitals test for COVID-19 upon admission. In the event that your client is positive, this may alter the birth plans in terms of visitors. ACOG says COVID alone is not a reason for increased interventions except in severe cases. (9) Clients who test positive should follow usual rooming-in policies with share-decision making. There is currently no evidence that the virus is transmitted in human milk. (10)

Doula Tips for Birth and Postpartum

UNDERSTAND THAT THINGS MIGHT BE DIFFERENT
AND CONSIDER... "HOW WILL SHE REMEMBER THIS?" -PENNY SIMKIN



What to wear:

Make sure you wear comfortable and easily washable clothes. Have an additional set of clothes with you. Be prepared to wear hospital protective gear over your clothing. Have a clean set of clothes at your door so you can remove your clothes before entering back home. Wear easily washable shoes. Use an N95, KN95 or similar mask, NOT a cloth mask.



What to bring:

Have lots of snacks and food with you for births. Movement around your hospital may be restricted, including movement to the cafeterias. Exchange reusable items from your doula bag with disposable items instead. Bring extra cash and self-care items in case of a longer support experience. Bring extra masks. Don't forget your washed hands and warm heart!



What to know:

Hospitals will have various protocols and they may change rapidly, even daily. Be prepared to be flexible with the protocols that are being put in place. You may not be able to switch out with a backup doula as usual, or you may have to switch in/out with the partner. Patience & grace will be of the essence. Policy changes rapidly.



What to remember:

This is an important time for your clients, the most precious days for their family. Anxiety may be high and adrenaline levels may interact with labor and new parenting. Work diligently to create a loving, peaceful environment despite the stress of it all. Planning for multiple scenarios can be beneficial.

WHAT DOULAS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PERSONAL PROTECTION

VIDEO RESOURCES:

Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with hospital infection control practices and PPE usage with these four video resources.

Why clean hands are so important



Donning protective gear (putting on)



Safer hand washing



Doffing protective gear (taking off)



Protect YOURSELF & Others!

IMPORTANT REMINDERS FOR OUR DOULAS

Healthy individuals are at low risk of severe complications from Coronavirus:

- Get good, restful sleep
- Eat a healthy balanced diet
- Exercise
- Wear an N95 or KN95 mask
- Get vaccinated, as appropriate for you
- Practice meditation and other mindfulness and/or spiritual practices for your mental health
- Boost your immunity and avoid getting sick
- Implement social distancing/proper ventilation as possible



Protect YOURSELF & Others!

THE BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF INCLUDE:

- Wearing a high-quality mask such as an N95 or KN95
- Get vaccinated as appropriate for you
- Know rapid testing options and locations
- Consider routine testing depending on your client load and testing availability in your location
- Stay home when you are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands and at all times when possible
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash



COVID-19 Variants

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER



It is normal for viruses to mutate or change. Some of these mutations alter symptoms of the disease, how contagious it is, how we test for the virus, or even how deadly it is. The science on COVID variants is rapidly changing with the variants themselves, so we've given you some links that are updated by scientists to help you find what is the most recent information.

Resources:

CDC on Variants

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/about-variants.html>

WHO on Tracking SARS CoV-2 Variants

<https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants/>

Resources



BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER

Resources:

#1 - Government of Canada: Know the facts about coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/know-facts-about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

#2 - Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>

#3 - Interim Considerations for Infection Prevention and Control of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Inpatient Obstetric Healthcare Settings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/inpatient-obstetric-healthcare-guidance.html>

#4 - Pregnant & Recently Pregnant People

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnant-people.html>

Resources

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER



Additional Resources:

#5 - Care for Breastfeeding People

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/care-for-breastfeeding-women.html>

#6 - Pregnancy Data: COVID-19 Risks During Pregnancy

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#pregnancy-data>

#7 - Indoor Air and Coronavirus (COVID-19)

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

#8 - Coronavirus Disease: Pregnancy & Childbirth

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pregnancy-and-childbirth>

Resources

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER

Additional Resources:

#9 - COVID-19 FAQs for Obstetrician-Gynecologists, Obstetrics

<https://www.acog.org/clinical-information/physician-faqs/covid-19-faqs-for-ob-gyns-obstetrics>

#10 - Resources to Address Coronavirus Disease (Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine)

<https://www.bfmed.org/covid-19-resource-page>

#11 - Postpartum Depression/Anxiety During COVID-19

<https://mhanational.org/postpartum-depressionanxiety-during-covid-19>

#12 - COVID-19 Research and NICHD

https://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/COVID/NICHD_Populations/Preg_Post



Resources

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER



Additional Resources:

#13 - THE CONVERSATION: Between Us, About Us, A New Campaign By Black Health Care Workers for Black People about the COVID-19 Vaccines

<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/press-release/the-conversation-between-us-about-us-a-new-campaign-by-black-health-care-workers-for-black-people-about-the-covid-19-vaccines/>

#14 - 5 Things to Know About the COVID-19 Vaccine and Pregnancy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfjrlb9-wPg>

#15 - Choosing a Mask or Respirator for Different Situations

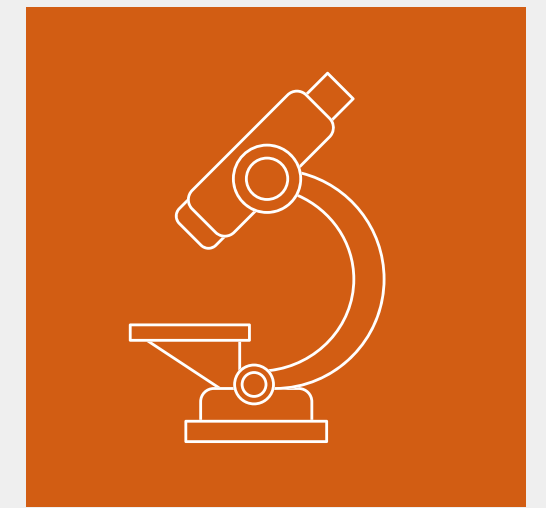
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html#:~:text=The%20most%20widely%20available%20are,Particulate%20Filtering%20Facepiece%20Respirators%20webpage>

#16 - Your Guide to Masks

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

Resources

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER



Additional Resources:

#17 - Mix-and-match trial finds additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine safe, immunogenic

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/mix-match-trial-finds-additional-dose-covid-19-vaccine-safe-immunogenic>

#18 - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: FDA Takes Key Action by Approving Second COVID-19 Vaccine

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-takes-key-action-approving-second-covid-19-vaccine>