

Pregnancy and Corona Virus Disease 2019: Public Health Perspective

Dear Editor,

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) owing to its novel nature, rapid global spread, and in the absence of any preventive or curative option has been declared as a pandemic. As of 8 June 2020, 6931000 cases and 400857 deaths have been reported across 216 nations and territories wherein the disease has been reported.^[1] Pregnancy with a COVID-19 infection has been recognized as a public health priority as the lives of both the mother and the child is at risk.

The limited findings pertaining to pregnant women have revealed that they are not at more risk to develop severe forms of the disease when compared with the general population.^[1,2] However, due to the multiple physiological adaptations and changes in the immune system during pregnancy, the option of development and progression of respiratory complications cannot be ruled out. This calls for the need to safeguard pregnant women from the novel infection and improve their health-seeking behavior if they develop respiratory complaints suggestive of the COVID-19 infection.^[2,3]

The pregnant women need to adopt the same precautions like other population groups (viz. frequent hand washing, maintaining social distancing, avoid touching eyes-nose-mouth, respiratory hygiene), and should maintain a good rapport with their health care providers to streamline their routine antenatal or postnatal hospital visits.^[2] As far as the diagnostic aspect is concerned, pregnant women should be prioritized for testing considering the need for expert care. At present, we are not conclusive about the risk of transmission of the virus from pregnant women to their fetus either during pregnancy or delivery, but the encouraging sign is that the available studies have reported that the virus was neither detected in the amniotic fluid nor the breast milk.^[3]

The pregnant women with the suspected or confirmed infection should not be deprived of their rights to high-quality care and should be treated with respect and need not be subjected unnecessarily to cesarean section.^[2] The initial recommendations advocate that the women with

the COVID-19 infection can touch or practice skin-to-skin care or breastfeed their child, but they should strictly adhere to respiratory hygiene, wash hands before and after touching the baby, and routinely clean and disinfect the touched surfaces. In case the woman is unwell to breastfeed their child directly, the option of expressed breastmilk, relactation, and donor human milk can be explored.^[2]

In conclusion, pregnancy with COVID-19 infection should be considered as a priority and amidst no conclusive evidence suggesting the transmission of infection from women to the fetus, the practice of routine care and breastfeeding has been recommended.

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Conflicts of interest

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