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Topic Public Health and COVID-19
Potential impact of COVID-19 in this topic area <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public health is about helping people to stay healthy and protecting them from threats to their health.• During the current pandemic it is important to remain vigilant around maintaining public health messages.
Current key guidance for this topic – clinical care and advice for women
Smoking <p>Evidence from the pandemic so far indicates that people who smoke are at much higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if they contract COVID-19. It is therefore particularly important to support women and their partners to stop smoking.</p> <p>Quitting smoking in pregnancy can make a significant difference to birth outcomes, reducing the risk of stillbirth, low birth weight and sudden infant death. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak some stop smoking interventions have been reduced or suspended. Women should be reminded of the risks and have access to support to quit through video calling, texts and timely provision of nicotine replacement therapy.</p>
Resources <p>Ilearn: Refresh your ‘Very Brief Advice’ technique on smoking in pregnancy: https://www.ilearn.rcm.org.uk/course/info.php?id=259</p> <p>NHS guidance on quitting smoking https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/?tabname=advice-and-support</p> <p>NHS guidance on smoking during pregnancy https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/smoking-pregnant/</p>
Financial hardship and social inclusion <p>The COVID-19 has triggered changes to employment that could cause financial hardship. Support and advice may be found from the UK government and 3rd sector agencies.</p>
Resources <p>Citizens Advice on COVID https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/</p> <p>Government assistance for vulnerable individuals https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable</p> <p>Maternity Action advice on employment rights for pregnant women https://maternityaction.org.uk/adviceline</p> <p>Shelter advice for people facing urgent housing issues https://england.shelter.org.uk/</p> <p>Trussell Trust advice on emergency assistance getting food https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/</p> <p>UK government guidance for those affected by COVID-19 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19</p>
Domestic Abuse <p>Measures to control the spread of COVID-19 which brought about social distancing and isolation that meant some people were more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Agencies are reporting a rise in incidents linked</p>

with COVID-19 and extra vigilance is therefore necessary, especially where in person visits are being reduced or undertaken virtually. It is vitally important that midwives are responsive to requests for confidential advice. Consider precautionary measures for families with known risk factors.

Resources

Refresh your knowledge with RCM i-learn

Domestic abuse <https://www.ilearn.rcm.org.uk/course/info.php?id=633>

TUC domestic abuse and coronavirus learning tool <https://learning.elucidat.com/course/5e875ae4d0715-5e8c6417dfc28>

Women's Aid COVID resource hub <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-resource-hub/>

Getting help:

National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 2000 247 or online

contact form <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/Contact-us> .

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428

Women's Aid webchat [Available Monday 10am -12pm]

Rape Crisis services - 0808 802 9999 <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/> – or webchat <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/live-chat-helpline/>

Nations specific:

Scotland 24-hour helpline: 0800 027 1234; Scottish women's aid <https://womensaid.scot/>

Northern Ireland 24-hour helpline: 0808 802 1414 Northern Ireland <https://www.womensaidni.org/>

Wales 24-hour helpline 0808 80 10 800: Welsh women's aid <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk>

Infant

Infant feeding

There is currently no clinical evidence to suggest that the virus can be transmitted through breastmilk. Infection can be spread to the baby in the same way as to anyone in close contact with you. The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any potential risks of transmission of the virus through breastmilk or by being in close contact with your child, however, this will be an individual decision and can be discussed with your midwife, health visitor or GP by telephone. If you wish to breastfeed, take precautions to limit the potential spread of Covid-19 to the baby

- Handwashing before touching the baby, breast pump or bottles
- Avoid coughing or sneezing on the baby while feeding
- Wear a facemask while feeding or caring for the baby, where available
- Where a breast pump is used, follow recommendations for cleaning after each use
- Consider asking someone who is well to feed the baby
- For babies who are bottle fed with formula or expressed milk, strict adherence to sterilisation guidelines is advised
- Where mothers are expressing breastmilk in hospital, a dedicated breast pump should be used

Resources

NHS guidance on breastfeeding <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/>

NHS guidance on express and bottle feeding <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/expressing-and-bottlefeeding/>

bottle-feeding/

Breast feeding network <https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/>

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/infant-feeding-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>

NCT helpline 0300 330 0700

Parents club Scotland <https://www.parentclub.scot/>

Exercise

Whether socially isolating or distancing, continuing to exercise in pregnancy is vitally important to maintaining a healthy weight, good circulation and mental wellbeing. Many safe exercise routines are suitable for the home, such as yoga. Encourage exercise and consider including tips and suggestions when running antenatal classes either virtually or in person.

Resources

NHS guidance on exercise during pregnancy <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pregnancy-exercise/>

Tommy's guidance on exercise during pregnancy <https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/impregnant/exercise-pregnancy/exercise-faqs/it-safe-exercise-pregnancy>

Nutrition

A balanced diet is important. Cereals, wholegrains and natural yogurt can provide essential fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Vitamin D supplementation is recommended to all women during pregnancy as it can help reduce the risk of respiratory infections. There have been some reports that people with low levels of vitamin D are at an increased risk of serious respiratory complications if they develop coronavirus. However, there is not enough evidence to show that taking vitamin D prevents coronavirus infection or is an effective treatment.

Most people living in northern hemispheres will have low levels of vitamin D and as such, we advise all pregnant women to consider taking 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day to keep your bones and muscles healthy. Vitamin D supplements are available from most pharmacies, supermarkets and other retailers.

Women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, with melanin pigmented (dark) skin, may be particularly at risk of low levels of vitamin D and are advised to take a higher dose of vitamin D.

For families that qualify, signpost to Healthy Start for vitamin supplements and additional financial support. For women who are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus due to an underlying condition such as heart or lung disease, signpost to government registration for assistance, which can include assistance with food delivery.

Resources

NHS guidance on pregnancy and diet <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/healthy-pregnancy-diet/>

NHS guidance on healthy eating in pregnancy <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/pregnancy/healthy-eating-pregnancy/>

Healthy Start UK <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>

Government assistance for vulnerable individuals <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

Infection control

All women should be provided with information about how to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19 through careful, frequent and thorough handwashing; the use of face coverings in enclosed public spaces and social distancing. Women should be encouraged to have the flu and pertussis vaccinations during pregnancy as flu season approaches.

Resources

NHS guidance on COVID infection control <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

NHS general guidance on infection control <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-prevent-germs-from-spreading/>

UK government guidance on COVID prevention and control <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhanovel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

References and links to online and virtual support and guidance

Health Protection Scotland <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/>

Public Health Agency Northern Ireland <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

Public Health England <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

Public Health Wales <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>