

Keeping Moms and Babies Safe during COVID-19



Supporting Indigenous wellness during COVID-19

This fact sheet is part of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's commitment to provide culturally-grounded and strength-based supports for First Nations people during COVID-19. These resources can provide guidance as our communities navigate the current global health crisis, while continuing to face existing health challenges, including substance use and mental health issues.

More women are seeking and accessing midwifery services instead of giving birth in hospital due to COVID-19.

The demand for midwives versus the supply is a concern. Pregnant women and newborn babies are among the most vulnerable and precious in First Nations communities. The shortage of midwives across the country is being felt now more than ever because of the increased demand. We need more First Nations midwives educated in our communities to bring back Indigenous traditions to help our families grow and be strong. (Couchie & Dion, 2020)

There is currently no evidence that suggests pregnant women are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 or that it negatively affects a developing child. (Government of Canada, 2020).

HOW CAN INDIGENOUS MIDWIVES HELP?

- Midwives are experts in supporting births outside hospital, such as in homes and birth centres, and can provide key insights to the healthcare system during this pandemic.
- Midwives generally have a closer relationship with their patients and are more available to them.
- First contact is usually by phone, and midwives can triage and assess women at their home, reducing hospital contact.
- Midwives have provided birthing support throughout history, including First Nations communities.
- Indigenous midwives have additional strength in their connection to traditional medicines which have played a role in First Nation survival in many past crises.
- Midwives carry ancient knowledge that will allow First Nations communities to be stronger and survive this pandemic as we have survived in the past.
- Midwives can increase people's access to sexual health, something which has become more difficult because of physical distancing and pressures on hospitals during COVID-19.
- Midwives have been moving toward support for pregnant and postpartum women online (offering online prenatal classes and teachings).
- Midwives have supports in place to protect themselves and the families they serve.

The National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (Couchie & Dion, 2020) and the Canadian Association of Midwives (2020) offer the following recommendations:

- maintaining home birth as it continues to be a safe place to give birth for many women
- utilizing birth centres to full capacity for all healthy people during the pandemic
- establish temporary birth centres to keep healthy people out of hospitals during the pandemic

Tips for expectant and new moms

- Be diligent about isolating and physical distancing.
- Avoid going to urban centres where there are more cases of COVID-19, putting yourself and baby at risk.
- Avoid hospitals and if possible, arrange telephone calls or videoconferencing with a midwife.
- Remember to take care of your own wellbeing and mental health.
- Have a strong support person available if possible, (grandma/auntie dropping off meals, phone calls to support etc.) but avoid unnecessary visitors to your home.
- Wash your hands before and after touching baby, keep surfaces clean, ensure your environment is safe for baby.
- Breastfeeding lowers baby's risk of infection and the virus that causes COVID-19 has not been found in breast milk.

REFERENCES

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