

Pregnant Women and Corona Virus Disease-2019 Outbreaks: What They Need to Know

Dear Editor,

The ongoing Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has questioned the preparedness of all the nations in the effective containment of the disease.^[1] The global estimates depict that a total of 1991562 cases and 130885 deaths (case fatality rate - 6.57%) has been reported in 213 nations and territories.^[1]

At present, the clinical spectrum of disease is not so clear among pregnant women, nevertheless, no striking variability has been observed between pregnant and non-pregnant women with regard to the clinical manifestations.^[2] The available evidence suggests that the chances of the mother-to-child transmission of the causative virus during the period of pregnancy is remote. Nevertheless in the post-natal period, a newborn is susceptible to acquire the infection.^[3]

Even though it has been reported that very small number of newborns have tested positive for the virus soon after birth, it is yet to be confirmed whether they acquired the virus before or after birth. Also, the virus has not been detected in amniotic fluid, breast milk, or other maternal samples.^[3] Similar results were obtained in a cohort of COVID-19 positive pregnant women in China, wherein the virus was not isolated in the amniotic fluid, cord blood or throat swabs taken from the neonates.^[2,3] Furthermore, even the samples of breast milk have tested negative for the virus, and thus breastfeeding has been recommended as per the universal norms, provided women strictly adhere to the infection prevention and control guidelines (like hand washing, regular disinfection of surfaces, etc.) and respiratory hygiene.^[2,4]

It is important to acknowledge that pregnancy in itself is a stressful condition and the presence of this novel infection complicates the entire physiological process.^[2-4] This calls for the need to offer breastfeeding counseling, provision of psychological and practical assistance to the women to initiate and continue breastfeeding.^[4] Moreover, mothers should be sensitized about the infection prevention and control measures and the practice of skin-to-skin contact, rooming-in, and kangaroo mother care all needs to be implemented and encouraged.^[4]

In conclusion, the management of COVID-19 infection and pregnancy is a challenge for the health professionals amidst the recent developments. However, till date, as the virus has not been detected in the breast milk and thus breastfeeding should be encouraged in COVID-19 positive pregnant women, with strict adherence to the respiratory hygiene and other infection prevention and control measures.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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