

# Doulas & COVID-19

A TOOLKIT FOR DOULAS



# What's Included in this toolkit?



## LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

- Facts about COVID-19
- How doulas can continue to support their clients
- Doula Do's
- 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, such as:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing and shortness of breath

## How does COVID-19 Spread?

Coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person through: respiratory droplets when you cough or sneeze, 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. These viruses are not known to spread through ventilation systems or through water.



# 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.



## 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, and sometimes it's best for public health to have the restrictions in place.

## 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.



Learn about the usage of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as: gloves, face masks or shields, and safety glasses. Practice social distancing - avoid large gatherings, cancel or reschedule events, and put 6 feet of space between yourself and others.



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). 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 these type 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 took place during SARS (2003) included:

### *Limits during labor:*

Some hospitals allowed only one person during labor. Clients often chose their partner. This one support person was not interchangeable (for example, the partner could not spend one hour and alternate with a doula, friend, or family member).

### *Limits immediately postpartum:*

Some hospitals didn't allow any support people during postpartum recovery.

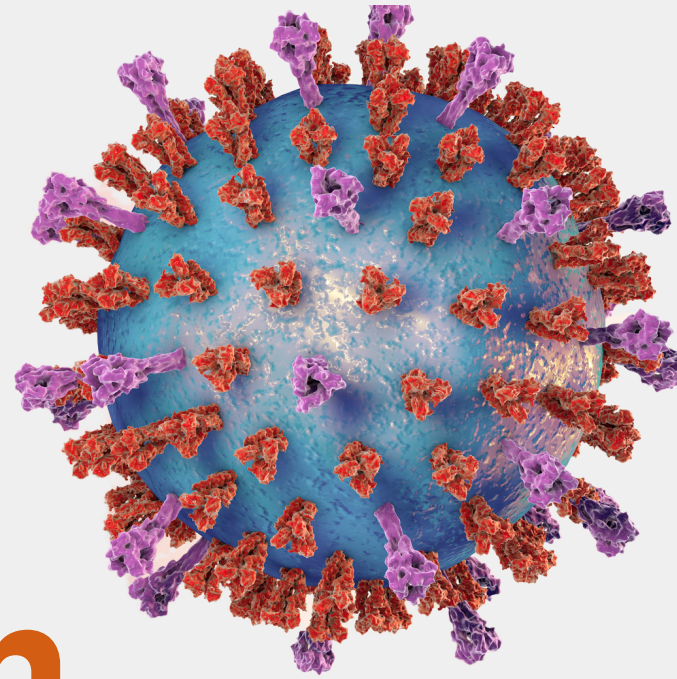
### *Restrictions on Doulas:*

Some hospitals allowed doulas, but only if they hadn't visited another hospital within a certain time frame prior, or only allowed one doula and no backup switch-outs.

### *Required health screenings:*

Some hospitals operated as usual, but with screening of all visitors as currently recommended by the CDC. (2)

# Best practices when working with clients



Given how new this virus is, we currently have very little data on how it might affect pregnant people and newborns. Guidelines from the CDC outline recommendations for how to support pregnant and laboring people with Coronavirus.(3) There is currently no evidence that the virus is spread from mother to baby in utero, or that it is transmitted in human milk.(4)

## *What if I'm not feeling well?*

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

## *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 cancelling 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.

# Doula Tips for Birth and Postpartum

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



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## *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.



## *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. 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.



## *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.



# 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
- Balance work with rest
- Practice meditation and other mindfulness and/or spiritual practices for your mental health
- Boost your immunity and avoid getting sick
- Implement social distancing as appropriate



# Protect YOURSELF & Others!

## THE BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF INCLUDE:

- Washing your hands often with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing; going to the bathroom and before and after eating or preparing food
- 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
- Stay home when you are sick



# 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/infection-control/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-Frequently Asked Questions and Answers: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) & Pregnancy

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnancy-faq.html>

# Resources

## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER



Additional Resources:

#5 - National Perinatal Association Facebook Page - Coronavirus Informational Social Media Images

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/NationalPerinatal/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=4306810646011735](https://www.facebook.com/pg/NationalPerinatal/photos/?tab=album&album_id=4306810646011735)

#6 - Interim Guidance on Breastfeeding for a Mother Confirmed or Under Investigation for COVID-19

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnancy\\_guidance-breastfeeding.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnancy_guidance-breastfeeding.html)