

COVID-19: A support guide for women and families following a diagnosis of heart disease during pregnancy

Many people in our community are feeling worried about COVID-19. For expectant parents who learn that their baby has a heart condition during pregnancy, the COVID-19 pandemic may be adding to feelings of worry and uncertainty at an already difficult time. There is support available for you and your family at the Heart Centre for Children. There are also simple things you can do to look after your emotional health. Here are some resources to help.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

You might have questions about how COVID-19 could affect your pregnancy, the birth of your baby, or your baby's cardiac care. Some expectant parents might be feeling concerned about their own health and the health of their baby. Others might be wondering if changes in hospital practices due to COVID-19 will affect their maternity care or their baby's time in hospital after birth. You may also have questions about practical things, like what to pack for your and your baby's hospital stay, and what accommodation is available for you and your family near the hospital.

Each family will have different questions, but no matter what your question is, we are here to help. While COVID-19 is an evolving situation, there is information available for women during pregnancy and there are people you can talk to about your questions and concerns. Talking with your and your baby's healthcare team can help you feel informed and supported. Here are some suggestions:

The Heart Centre for Children

If you have questions about your baby's heart condition and the plan for treatment and care after your baby's birth, the best people to talk to are your fetal cardiologist and the team at the Heart Centre for Children. Our **clinical nurse consultants** can be contacted by phone on **(02) 9845 2346**, or email: SCHN-CardiacCNC@health.nsw.gov.au (Mon-Fri: 9am-4pm).

What is happening in our community and around the world in relation to COVID-19 can affect how we think and feel. Our dedicated team of **psychologists** are here to support you and provide strategies to help during times of stress and fear. You can call our psychologists on **(02) 9845 0088** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm). Please leave a message and one of our psychologists will return your call.

Your pregnancy care team

If you have questions about your pregnancy and the birth of your baby, the best people to talk to are your pregnancy healthcare providers. This might be your midwife, GP or obstetrician. If you are receiving your obstetric care at Westmead Hospital, you can call the **Perinatal Advice, Referral and Liason Service (PEARLS)** midwives on **0409 448 609** or visit the Women's and Newborn Health Westmead Hospital website at www.wslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/wnh/home/

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (RANZCOG)

RANZCOG has detailed information about COVID-19 for pregnant women and their families. The website is updated as new information becomes available:

<https://ranzcof.edu.au/statements-guidelines/covid-19-statement>

Other sources of information on COVID-19 include:

<http://www.heartcentreforchildren.com.au/covid-19-information-support-guides.html>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

What can I do to keep well emotionally?

Take breaks from media coverage

Constant exposure to negative information can cause anxiety. While it is good to stay informed, try to find a balance. Take breaks from media coverage, including social media, and give your mind a rest.

Keep up healthy habits

Keeping healthy habits, such as getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising are always important for our emotional health, but it can be harder to maintain these habits during stressful times. Exercise reduces stress and tension. It also gives you energy and improves your mood. Even a brief walk outside in the fresh air can make a difference.

Stay connected

Feeling connected to others is an important part of being human. Social distancing and periods of self-isolation to manage the spread of COVID-19 can disrupt our connections with others. Try to stay in touch with friends and family. Use FaceTime or Skype to help feel connected when you can't be together. Listening to music or a podcast that you enjoy might also help you feel connected with the community around you.

Stick to normal routines as much as possible

Most people are experiencing changes in their daily life as a result of COVID-19. Many people are working from home, social or sporting events have been cancelled, and children may be staying home from school. A daily routine can help to bring familiar structure to your day and ensure you have time for work, rest and fun activities.

Make time for the things you enjoy

This is often easier said than done! Taking time to recharge can lift your mood and energy levels, and often helps you to be more available to your loved ones. Think about what you find fun and rewarding. This might include reading a book or magazine, calling a friend, soaking in the bathtub, watching a comedy, playing an instrument, or listening to music.

Give your mind a break

Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Mindfulness meditation can reduce feelings of worry and anxiety, and help you feel calm and more connected with others. Even brief mindfulness practices can be beneficial. If you're new to meditation, here are some apps to try:

- Insight Timer: www.insighttimer.com
- Calm: www.calm.com
- Headspace: www.headspace.com

Draw on your strengths

More often than not, we are able to handle difficult situations better than we might have imagined. Remember what you've accomplished already. Thinking about how you've coped with challenges in the past can serve as a reminder of your resilience and reserve. We don't know exactly what this pandemic will bring, but that doesn't necessarily mean it will overwhelm our abilities.

Where can I find extra support?

It is natural to feel stressed and overwhelmed. Remember there is support for you and your family. The Heart Centre for Children has a team of psychologists who are dedicated to supporting children with heart disease and their families. If you would like to talk to a member of our psychology team, please call **(02) 9845 0088** (Mon-Fri: 8:30am-5pm). Please leave a message and one of our psychologists will return your call. This is a free service available to all children and families affected by childhood heart disease in NSW and may be provided by telehealth (phone or video sessions) when appropriate.

You can also speak with your GP about how to access extra support. Your GP may be able to provide a referral to a psychologist in your local area. If your GP provides a psychology referral,

you may be eligible to receive a Medicare rebate. You may also be able to receive psychology services via telehealth (phone or video sessions) so you do not have to travel. Ask your GP for more information.

We all have different life circumstances and this can influence what support we need. Social workers often work alongside psychologists to help people overcome challenges and improve their wellbeing in times of stress or difficulty. Social workers work with individuals and families to help identify the issues concerning them and assist them in identifying strategies and resources to address these. Social workers can offer you and others in your family information and counselling, as well as put you in touch with other support services. If you would like to talk to a member of the social work team at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, please call **(02) 9845 2641** (Mon-Fri: 8:30am-5pm).

We have also included a list of other support services and resources on the next page.

Helpful Services	Phone numbers
Heart Centre for Children psychology team http://www.heartcentreforchildren.com.au/support-for-families.html	(02) 9845 0088 8:30am-5pm Mon – Fri
The Children’s Hospital at Westmead social work team www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/find-a-service/health-medical-services/social-work/chw	(02) 9845 2641 8:30am-5pm Mon – Fri
PANDA – Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia www.panda.org.au	1300 726 306 9am – 7:30pm Mon – Fri
Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au	1800 882 436 7am – Midnight 7 days a week
Gidget Foundation Australia (Perinatal Anxiety and Depression) www.gidgetfoundation.org.au	1300 851 758 9am – 7pm Mon - Fri
COPE – Centre of Perinatal Excellence www.cope.org.au	
Beyond Blue www.beyondblue.org.au	1300 224 636 24 hours a day 7 days a week
Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au	13 11 14 24 hours a day 7 days a week
Mensline www.mensline.org.au	1300 789 978 24 hours a day 7 days a week
Kids Helpline www.kidshelpline.com.au	1800 55 1800 24 hours a day 7 days a week
Family Violence Helpline www.1800respect.org.au	1800 737 732 24 hours a day 7 days a week
Relationships Australia www.relationships.org.au	1300 364 277 9am – 5pm Mon – Fri

Useful Resources

PANDA – Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia

<https://www.panda.org.au/info-support/supports-for-parents-anxious-about-coronavirus>

Gidget Foundation

<https://gidgetfoundation.org.au/get-support/covid-19-support/>

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak

Australian Psychological Society

<https://www.psychology.org.au/About-Us/news-and-media/Media-releases/2020/Coronavirus-psychologists-offer-advice-for-mainta>

<https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf>

Heartkids Australia

<https://www.heartkids.org.au/whats-on/news/coronavirus-update>

Raising Children Network: Australian Parenting Website

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>

NCTSN: Activities for children during social distancing

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/simple-activities-children-and-adolescents>

Sources: Beyond Blue, PANDA, Gidget Foundation, Australian Psychological Society.