



## **COVID-19: A support guide for families following a fetal diagnosis of heart disease.**

Many people in our community are feeling worried about COVID-19. For expectant moms and dads who learn about their baby's 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 Cincinnati Children's. 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?**

Not everyone will have questions about COVID-19, but some expectant parents may want or need a little more information. You might have questions about how COVID-19 could affect your pregnancy, the birth of your baby, or your baby's heart 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 the 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, 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 Institute at Cincinnati Children's**

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 Institute. Our **Fetal Cardiology Team** can be contacted by phone on **513-636-9087** (Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm), or by email: [lauren.boxell@cchmc.org](mailto:lauren.boxell@cchmc.org).

What is happening in our community and around the world in relation to COVID-19 can affect how we think and feel. Our dedicated **Psychology Team** is here to support you and can provide strategies to help during times of stress and fear. If you would like to schedule a telemedicine visit with one of our psychologists (Dr. Stacey Morrison or Dr. Michelle Ernst), call **513-636-8107** (Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm). When you call, please let our Patient Representative know you are a patient of the Fetal Cardiology Service.

The Cincinnati Children's website also has information on COVID-19:

<https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/patients/coronavirus-information>

<https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/patients/coronavirus-information/condition-specific/heart>



### **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 obstetric team, your primary care doctor, or your maternal fetal medicine team.

### **The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)**

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

<https://www.acog.org/patient-resources/faqs/pregnancy/coronavirus-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>

Other sources of information on COVID-19 include:

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Ohio Department of Health: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/>
- Cincinnati Health Department: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/health/covid-19/>

## **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. 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. 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. Physical distancing 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 you enjoy can also help you feel connected with the community around you.

You might also want to build new connections by joining a local or national heart group, like Conquering CHD, Cincinnati Chapter. To find out more, take a look at the Conquering CHD website: <https://www.conqueringchd.org/> Families can also request information and a care package by sending an email to: [CCHD.OH@conqueringchd.org](mailto:CCHD.OH@conqueringchd.org)

### **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. It can 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:

- Calm: [www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com)
- Headspace: [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)
- Insight Timer: [www.insighttimer.com](http://www.insighttimer.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's natural to feel stressed and overwhelmed. Remember there is support for you and your family. The **Heart Institute** team are dedicated to supporting children with heart disease and their families. If you would like to talk to a member of our team, please call: **513-636-9931**.

Our **Fetal Cardiology Social Worker**, Allison Gray can assist with a variety of psychosocial needs, including:

- Lodging, relocation and contact with Ronald McDonald House and local hotels
- Transportation
- Meal assistance during your baby's hospital stay
- Community resources to assist with food, clothing, infant supplies, housing, legal guidance, and other useful resources
- Emotional health resources at Cincinnati Children's Hospital or in your community
- Family, custody and visitation mediation
- Care coordination between organizations, such as school, work, mental health services, insurance providers, state and federal programs, legal organizations, child protective services, and other providers.

If you have questions or concerns, or would like to know more about the supports available, please call Allison Gray on **513-636-8221** or email: [Allison.Gray@cchmc.org](mailto:Allison.Gray@cchmc.org).



Here is a list of other support services and resources you might find useful:

**National Perinatal Association**

[http://www.nationalperinatal.org/mental\\_health](http://www.nationalperinatal.org/mental_health)

**Postpartum Support International Helpline**

Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

<https://www.postpartum.net/>

1-800-944-4773

Press 1 for Español

Press 2 for English

Or TEXT

503-894-9453 English

971-420-0294 Español

**Conquering CHD**

<https://www.conqueringchd.org/>

<https://www.conqueringchd.org/covid-19-update/>

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
National Distress Helpline**

Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Text TalkWithUs to 66746

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**

Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

<https://www.thehotline.org/help/>

1-800-799-SAFE (7233) English

1-800-787-3224 En Español

**Lifeline Crisis Chat**

Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

1-800-273-8255