Coronavirus update 4/11/2020

Hello again!

Just checking in with an update. All of our doctors remain healthy, and we are enjoying seeing our patients in-person and on telehealth. And it appears that the hard work of social distancing is in fact making a real impact – while the number of COVID-19 cases in Connecticut continues to rise, it is rising at a much slower pace than projected prior to the difficult but important decision to “Stay Safe, Stay Home.”

We continue to feel very confident that you are making the right choice to deliver at Yale New Haven Hospital. In fact, our Obstetrics department has taken impressive steps to ensure the safety and health of our moms, babies, birth partners, providers and staff. We want to clarify these changes for you because we are hearing misinformation from some of our patients. It is important to understand that each and every person caring for you – from the staff in our office to the nurses and doctors at the hospital to the person delivering your meals or cleaning your room – is focused on providing state-of-the-art safe and compassionate care. None of the new practices outlined below is meant to cause you anxiety but rather provide confidence that you are, indeed, receiving the most thoughtful, evidence-based, and safe care.

COVID-19 SCREENING: Yale New Haven Hospital instituted universal screening of all pregnant women admitted to the hospital to ensure that we are able to identify patients with COVID-19, even if they are currently asymptomatic. You may be relieved to know that thus far we have not had any asymptomatic patients screen positive for COVID-19. We feel confident in the sensitivity of the testing being done because we have not had women who initially screened negative subsequently become symptomatic or screen positive. To repeat, social distancing is working!

…but what if I SCREEN POSITIVE FOR COVID-19?: Yale New Haven Hospital is the first hospital in the country to rapidly build out an Obstetrics Comprehensive Care Unit specific for patients who are positive for COVID-19. This incredible development allows us to minimize viral exposure and transmission risk for our healthy pregnant mothers and their support person, as well as for our staff. What does this mean for you? If you are a healthy mother, you will be delivering on a labor floor and recovering on a postpartum floor where there are no COVID-19 positive patients. If you are affected by COVID-19 you will be cared for in a specialized, negative pressure labor and postpartum area that will maximize the safety for you, your support person, your baby and the people caring for you.

CAN MY BABY STAY WITH ME?: This is probably the most pressing question on all of your minds, and we want to reassure you that all decisions during your entire prenatal, labor and delivery and postpartum care are made with you, utilizing shared decision making and informed consent. We, your doctors, are committed to making sure that you and your support person remain informed with the best data and supported in whatever decisions you choose to make for yourself and your baby. The current recommendation from the Pediatrics department is to separate a mother who is positive for COVID-19 from her newborn baby to best prevent transmission of coronavirus to the baby. During this time, the baby would be cared for by an asymptomatic caregiver (your spouse, another family member, etc.) and you can express pumped breastmilk for the baby. This decision can only happen with your consent. If you and your support person choose to room with your newborn, and/or engage in skin-to-skin and breastfeeding, the Pediatricians recommend that you wear a mask and practice hand/breast hygiene and when possible keep the baby at least 6 feet away in the isolette. We cannot emphasize enough that your baby will not be taken away from you without your consent. Our job as your physicians, and the Pediatrician’s job as your baby’s physician, is to ensure that you are informed with the most up-to-date and factual information so that you can make the best decisions for you and your family.
**LABOR SUPPORT PERSON:** We believe that a labor support person is essential to your in-patient care. Yale New Haven Hospital continues to allow one labor support person for each admitted pregnant woman, and we do not anticipate any changes to this policy. Your labor support person will be screened for fever as well as symptoms of coronavirus infection. Any asymptomatic person who passes the screening guidelines is eligible to be your labor support person, even if you screen positive for COVID-19. This is great news and supports those COVID-19 positive mothers whose partners have been exposed (for example, by living in the same house) but remain asymptomatic. Be mindful that it remains the policy that any labor support person who has resided in or commuted to New York State in the 14 days prior to your admission will not be allowed to accompany you. Please understand that this is to protect you, the other patients and babies around you, and all of the people caring for you during your admission.

**FACEMASKS:** Very good data supports the efficacy of facemasks in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19. As such, to protect both you and our staff, all hospital providers are routinely wearing facemasks (often with face shields) while interacting with you, and there is more than enough personal protective equipment (PPE) at Yale New Haven Hospital! We are also encouraging patients and visitors to wear facemasks as an added layer of protection. We have certainly noticed that many of you are already doing this for your office visits – please continue to do so, and bring your mask with you to the labor floor. While there is no current hospital policy requiring facemasks, we believe this added layer of protection is appropriate and will protect you and your partner. You do not need the highly discussed N95 mask – a regular surgical mask or homemade fabric facemask is just fine. If you need a facemask please let us know, we have a limited supply of extra masks that we can give to you.

**LABOR ANALGESIA:** Due to the risk of aerosolization of viral particles with the use of nitrous oxide, this method of pain control is not currently being offered. Our full-time obstetric anesthesia team remains ready to provide epidurals as needed for pain relief.

**LACTATION SUPPORT:** We continue to have in-patient lactation support. In addition, the hospital is now offering outpatient lactation visits via telehealth. To schedule an appointment, call 203.688.3840, option 4.

**CHILDBIRTH EDUCATION:** Unfortunately, all in-person childbirth education classes and maternity tours have been cancelled. Fortunately, evidence-based, family-centered and baby-friendly eClasses are still available and can be accessed on a computer, tablet or phone. In addition, they are working on updating a picture gallery so that you can get a better sense of what the labor floor and postpartum areas look like. To learn more, visit: [www.ynhh.org/services/maternity-services](http://www.ynhh.org/services/maternity-services)

Information is power, and this email to you is meant to empower you by keeping you informed. We believe strongly that the current hospital policies are keeping you and your baby, as well as your providers, healthy and safe. If you are anxious or unsettled by anything we have explained, please call. We are here to answer your questions and support you! We want each of you to feel the joy and anticipation of having a baby – we do not want you feeling overwhelmed and scared by having a baby during the coronavirus pandemic. We feel confident that you can focus your attention on being excited to bring new life into this world knowing that we are doing everything we can to keep you and your growing family safe and healthy.

And since you all know what we want you to do – social distance, wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes – we will conclude this email by reminding you instead to take care of yourselves. Meditate (even if you think it’s weird), exercise (even if you prefer to binge watch Netflix), eat well (cook something new!), get outside (even if the pollen tickles your nose), sleep (ha!!).
We remain 100% here for you! Tell us how we can help ease your worries. We are all in this together – and we are flattening the curve!!

Warm Regards,

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