

# Social media use during pregnancy: A response to COVID-19 social isolation

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A prenatal patient in tears, asking if her partner will be able to attend her delivery and stay postpartum. A woman with medical complications considering a home birth for fear that she may contract COVID-19 in hospital. A single mother, 2 weeks postpartum, socially isolated with her newborn and 2-year-old. A 2-month-old baby due for routine immunizations, her parents too scared to bring her in.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we support our patients and how healthcare is delivered. Social support plays an essential role in reducing anxiety and depression in new mothers (1). Now, in addition to routine worries related to pregnancy, there is a novel virus, COVID-19, with accompanying unknowns about its effects on pregnancy, fetal, and neonatal development. This coupled with the contradictions about the disease in mainstream media and social isolation are contributing to heightened levels of anxiety for pregnancy and postpartum patients.

Prenatal care has rapidly changed with fewer in-person visits, inability for partners to attend visits, and limits to support persons in labor and postpartum. Given the many uncertainties during COVID-19, patients are turning to the media, looking for updates about how the Pandemic is progressing as well as the effects on their pregnancy and newborns. People are using social media outlets, like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, in addition to mainstream media to stay up to date. Instagram is a free video and photo sharing website and mobile application (app), that is accessed by 1 billion users each month.

Social media can be used to foster a sense of community amongst mothers and help women feel more connected to their peers as well as their fetuses (1). Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the usual avenues of meeting other mothers and finding a social network do not currently exist for parents. Image-based platforms, like Instagram can be beneficial at overcoming social isolation as they can simulate a social presence (2).

Searching for reliable sources may lead to even more anxiety for expecting parents and families. The quality of medical information on social media is highly variable, which puts the onus on the users to determine which sources they should trust (3). In response to challenges related to COVID-19 on perinatal physical and mental health, we came together to provide an online social media platform for expecting and postpartum parents: the @PandemicPregnancyGuide ([www.instagram.com/PandemicPregnancyGuide](http://www.instagram.com/PandemicPregnancyGuide)). The purpose of this virtual platform is to provide reliable and up-to-date medical information and to foster a virtual community for expecting individuals and their partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided patients with routine prenatal advice, in addition to specific posts about changes in care as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Research has demonstrated that women are interested in engaging with health care professionals on social media (1). In just over two months, we have amassed almost 9000 followers. It is clear that pregnant individuals and their families are feeling a great deal of strain right now. Through this platform, we are offering support, knowledge, information and most importantly a sense of community.

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