



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

August 20, 2020

Dear Pennsylvania Maternal Health Providers:

Thank you for your great work during this demanding time as we work toward mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. I appreciate your tremendous effort to keep Pennsylvanians safe and healthy while providing quality care to your pregnant patients.

A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted that for reproductive-age women with COVID-19, pregnant women were at an increased risk for severe illness compared with non-pregnant women. Specifically, pregnancy was associated with an increased risk for ICU admission and mechanical ventilation. The study also indicated that Hispanic and Black pregnant patients may be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Communication to your patients about their risks and steps to prevent infection is vitally important, for both pregnant patients and those planning a pregnancy.

In addition to providing appropriate communication about risk and infection prevention, the Department of Health (the "Department") strongly encourages labor and delivery providers to follow recommendations from the CDC, the World Health Organization and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) in caring for pregnant patients during this unprecedented time, including allowing a support person to be present during delivery. The Department also strongly encourages hospitals to allow for the presence of a pregnant patient's doula, in addition to a support person, during labor and delivery, as indicated in the Guidance on Hospitals' Responses to COVID-19 updated on July 10, 2020. When caring for COVID-19 positive pregnant patients, providers should engage in shared decision making with their patients and counsel patients regarding breastfeeding and contact with their infant. It is important that all pregnant patients in Pennsylvania receive supportive care before, during and after childbirth, and that they are treated with dignity and respect.

It is of utmost importance that healthcare providers take all appropriate measures to prevent staff exposure to COVID-19. The Department is supportive of policies that protect labor and delivery staff. Without healthy staff, services will become more limited in the commonwealth, thus limiting the ability to provide safe care for pregnant patients in Pennsylvania. Providers should utilize telemedicine when appropriate to provide prenatal and postpartum care, and hospitals should take advantage of ACOG resources, including simulations, to train staff and prepare to care for a COVID-19 patient during labor and delivery. Additional resources on pregnancy and COVID-19 are available from the CDC.

Please ensure that messaging to your patients is clear regarding your facility's policies, as well as how patients and their families can prevent infection. As you know, addressing maternal mortality and morbidity is a priority for the Department and Governor Wolf. We will continue to make safe and quality care for pregnant patients a priority in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "RL Levine".

Rachel L. Levine, MD
Secretary of Health