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Catholic Health Offers Safeguards for Maternity Patients During Coronavirus Public Health Emergency

Universal COVID-19 testing now available to all moms before delivery

With the Coronavirus changing everything from how we work and go to school to a simple trip to the grocery store, OB/GYN specialists from Catholic Health held a virtual press conference this morning to send an important message to pregnant women throughout Western New York about one thing that has not changed – its hospitals are still the safest places to have a baby.

In the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Catholic Health has taken a series of steps to protect moms and babies at its three birthing hospitals, which include Sisters of Charity Hospital, Main St. Campus; Mercy Hospital of Buffalo; and Mount St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston.

"Catholic Health has always made the health and safety of moms and babies our highest priority and that has not changed," said Hans P. Cassagnol, MD, MMM, FACOG, CPE, Executive Vice President, Chief Clinical Officer & Chief Physician Executive for the health system. "Because most of Catholic Health's COVID-19 patients are being cared for at our Treatment Facility at St. Joseph Campus in Cheektowaga, pregnant women should feel comfortable going to any of one of our maternity hospitals to deliver their baby."

Today, the health system also announced that it will institute universal COVID-19 testing for all women prior to delivery. Expectant moms with scheduled inductions and C-sections will be tested three days before their planned delivery, while women who come to the hospital in labor for an unscheduled delivery will receive a rapid COVID-19 test at the time of their admission.

"In most cases, we can have the test back in about an hour to provide expectant families with greater peace of mind," added Dr. Cassagnol, who is a trained OB/GYN physician in addition to his administrative role at Catholic Health. "If a mom tests positive, we have special protocols in place to protect the entire family, while enabling her to provide all the care her baby needs, including breastfeeding."

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In recent weeks, Catholic Health has seen an alarming trend of women in active labor who wait too long to go to the hospital or try to deliver at home and then go to the hospital. "Women do not need to change their birth plans because of Coronavirus," says Anthony Pivarunas, Chair of OB/GYN Services for Catholic Health. "More importantly, they should not wait to get to the hospital when active labor begins. Being able to monitor mother and baby enables us to provide the safest birth possible."

Catholic Health has had cases of women delivering in its hospital parking lots and Emergency Departments because they couldn't make it to the Labor & Delivery units. "This is not the kind of experience anybody wants," Dr. Pivarunas continued. "We want women to have the full advantage of our birthing rooms and the support of our Labor & Delivery teams, in the most comfortable setting possible."

For women who are newly pregnant or think they might be, Dr. Pivarunas also recommends beginning prenatal care as soon as possible. "All Catholic Health OB/GYN practices, including Trinity Medical OB/GYN and those within Catholic Medical Partners, are implementing safety measures in their offices to ensure women get the care they need for themselves and their babies," Dr. Pivarunas continued. "As always, women should contact their OB/GYN provider if they have any questions. We also have a number at Catholic Health women can call, 716-923-1907, if they have any birthing-related questions. "

In addition to at-home and online childbirth education classes, with one-on-one support from specially-trained childbirth educators, Catholic Health is also offering early discharge, in 24-hours or less for most normal deliveries, as another added safety measure. During their hospital stay, moms, babies, and birth partners are also "cocooned" in the safety of their hospital rooms.

"While this is a trying time for everyone, there is something very special about having just mom, baby and her birth partner spend time alone together during the first precious hours after giving birth," said Maryanne Murphy, Director of Maternal/Child Services at Mercy Hospital of Buffalo. "As we recognize the miracle of childbirth and the treasured moments a newborn brings, it's beautiful to see the uninterrupted bonding our patients are getting to experience."

Women who need OB/GYN Services, or have any questions about delivering at Catholic Health, may call 716-923-1907 from 8 am to 5 pm, or visit chsbuffalo.org/deliver or HealthyMomHealthyBaby.org.

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