

# Pregnancy Plans Being Put on Hold During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Experts say couples have both logistical and financial concerns about getting pregnant during a stressful time such as the pandemic. Getty Images

- A new survey indicates that more than 30 percent of couples who were considering pregnancy this year are delaying those plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Experts say the reasons range from logistical concerns such as hospital visits, to financial issues such as the possibility of losing a job or health insurance.
- They say women who still plan to get pregnant in the near future should work to relieve stress, as well as start eating healthy and get adequate sleep and exercise.

*All data and statistics are based on publicly available data at the time of publication. Some information may be out of date. Visit our [coronavirus hub](#) and follow our [live updates page](#) for the most recent information on the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Samantha and David\* decided late last summer that it was time to give their 2-year-old son a sibling.

They felt prepared for the road ahead.

That journey included IVF treatments along with being parents and working full time.

Samantha got pregnant early this year but had a miscarriage in early March.

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down most of the world days later, Samantha took it as a sign. Perhaps it was time to reconsider their plan.

“We want our son to have a sibling,” Samantha told [name removed]. “But we’re blessed to have him. Maybe the world is guiding me.”

Samantha is not alone.

According to a survey published this summer, around 30 percent of people who were considering pregnancies this year are delaying those plans due to the pandemic.

Officials at organizations such as Planned Parenthood tell [name removed] they’ve experienced increases in requests for birth control and emergency birth control.

“Post pandemic baby boom? Not so much,” said Varsha Rao, chief executive officer of NURX, the largest women’s health digital practice.

Rao told [name removed] they've seen a 50 percent increase in requests for birth control in every month since the pandemic hit.

Emergency contraceptives such as Plan B saw a 40 percent increase in requests starting in April and May.

"There's tremendous uncertainty out there, both from a health and financial point of view," Rao said. "We believe that many women are holding off and want to plan more carefully."

## **A multitude of concerns**

Rao said women are sharing that they're concerned about what it would be like to deliver a baby if pandemic restrictions continue.

There's also the possible loss of jobs or health insurance, in addition to more limited access to extended family during and after pregnancy.

Dr. Mark N. Simon, MMM, CPE, the chief medical officer of the Ob Hospitalist Group, told [name removed] that downturns in pregnancy rates are common in times of financial uncertainty.

"Any time there is an economic turn down, birth rates go down," he said.

This year's downturn, he said, could be the biggest decline since the 2008 recession.

Simon said the concerns facing families that are considering pregnancy have multiplied.

They include logistical questions ranging from where will they go for appointments to if their parents can see their grandchild and who can come with them when they deliver to daycare after the baby is born.

There are also financial issues that include if they'll still have a job or insurance if the fall and winter bring more shutdowns.

"For women, it's a serious question," Simon said. "Let's be honest. There are no long-term studies on how [COVID-19] affects the pregnant woman or the child."

Simon also strikes down what he calls the "blackout myth."

"In reality, that does not really happen," he said. "With so many contraceptive options now, even in a blackout or a shut down, contraception works and is easy to access."

## **Emotions running high**

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association conducted a survey in April and May on the current feelings of those trying to conceive. They found that the amount of women who are stressed, scared, and worried is high.

Betsy Campbell, the chief engagement officer at RESOLVE, said the survey revealed that 68 percent of women felt sad, 65 percent felt worried, and 56 percent felt nervous either frequently or all the time.

Campbell told [name removed] that while they only have anecdotal data on what decisions women are making based on the pandemic, they're seeing patterns.

"Some are eager to resume treatment because of the time already lost given that infertility is time sensitive and prognosis worsens with age," she said. "Others are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy and have opted to wait until more is known or the outbreak is more under control."

## Offering support and services

Both RESOLVE and Planned Parenthood moved quickly to offer support for those struggling with the issues via online programs and sharing platforms like Zoom.

"Because RESOLVE's 200-plus peer-led support groups were no longer able to meet in person due to COVID-19, we trained our volunteers to host virtual meetings instead and also launched national virtual support groups

open to anyone struggling to build a family, regardless of location,” Campbell said.

She said the reaction has been positive, and they will continue to offer this support “for the foreseeable future.”

Planned Parenthood has seen an increase in those looking to prevent or end pregnancy as well.

“Overall, we’ve seen an increase in patients accessing birth control methods, including the pill, patch, and ring, via telehealth,” Dr. Gillian Dean, the senior director of medical services at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, told [name removed].

Dean said Planned Parenthood has also “seen an uptick in the number of patients accessing medication abortion.”

“While this increase in abortion could be due to several factors, some patients are making the decision to end pregnancies and postpone their plans to expand their families due to the uncertainty and unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the loss of employment or reduced job security, or even heightened responsibilities as essential workers or caregivers to their family members” Dean said.

Tsao-Lin Moy, LAc, MSOM, is the founder of Integrative Healing Arts and an expert in Chinese medicine who treats couples struggling with fertility and helps them reduce stress.

Moy told [name removed] that during the pandemic stress is abundant and couples who decide to go forward with conception should consider that fact.

“Stress is the biggest disrupter of reproductive hormones,” Moy said. “It’s not about relaxing, it is about the overall function of the nervous system being triggered over and over, creating anxiety.”

Moy advises women who are considering pregnancy to double down now on eating well, getting rest and exercise, and considering stress relievers such as acupuncture.

One more thing she adds: Men need to do their part as well.

A 2015 study

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concluded that 40 to 50 percent of infertility cases among couples are related to male fertility.

“With regard to COVID-19, studies

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show the virus can damage testicular cells and interfere with spermatogenesis causing problems with male fertility,” Moy said. “Men should get tested for antibodies and also sperm health. Preemptively, they can freeze sperm for the future as well.”

## What's ahead

How will this end?

Will there be a post-COVID-19 baby boom?

No expert is quite sure yet.

“You have to remember we’ve had numerous low birth rate years in a row before this,” Simon said.

But, he added, he hopes those considering conceiving stay up to date on facts as they emerge.

Most of all, he said, don’t panic too much.

“Don’t walk away with this fear that pregnancy and COVID-19 are a dangerous mix,” he said. “We’re all still learning.”



*\*Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.*