

# The Fertility Center

William Dodds MD, James Young MD, Valerie Shavell MD, Mili Thakur MD

## COVID-19 INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Patient Name/DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner Name/DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

During a nationwide infectious disease outbreak, it is especially important to consider your decision to engage in fertility treatment. The following information is intended to help you and your partner, if applicable, make good decisions about your reproductive health and the health and well-being of a potential child. In order to move forward with fertility testing and treatment at our center, please read and acknowledge your understanding of the following information.

### DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF COVID-19

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large group of viruses that cause diseases in both animals and humans. In humans, coronaviruses cause mild respiratory tract infections that are similar to the flu or common cold. Certain coronaviruses can be lethal, such as SARS, MERS and **COVID-19**. COVID-19 (or the novel CoV that was first identified in December 2019) is of recent concern due to the pneumonia outbreak this virus caused in Wuhan, China, and the resulting pandemic that has affected so many in the United States and elsewhere.

The symptoms associated with this virus include fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Symptoms traditionally occur 2-14 days after exposure. In some people, symptoms may not occur at all or be very mild. Symptoms may be more severe in people who are immunocompromised or who have underlying illnesses such as diabetes, asthma and other respiratory conditions, hypertension and cardiac disease. These individuals may be at greater risk. People with mild cases generally recover within a few days; however, in more severe cases recovery may require intensive hospitalization over weeks to months and death may occur.

COVID-19 is spread through person-to-person transmission and occurs much like other respiratory viruses – mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is important to be aware that many cases of COVID-19 infection are caused by being in close contact with a person who is asymptomatic (meaning that he or she has no symptoms). Another mode of transmission is through contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, followed by touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses may survive on surfaces for several days. Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID-19.

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19, and there is no evidence that antivirals or supplements are curative. Treatment generally consists of supportive care for respiratory symptoms and other compromised body systems, if needed. This information on the disease led to the WHO and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for stay-at-home orders, which have been implemented in many geographic areas to help slow transmission of the disease.

It is important to note that COVID-19 will not be easily eradicated or controlled. The virus will continue to be a safety consideration for a long time as the world, and fertility centers, gradually return to established routines. Staying up to date is essential because there is so much about this disease that is unknown. As more information is learned about COVID-19, guidelines and regulations will change and approaches to fertility treatment may be impacted.

## INFORMATION ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PREGNANCY

At this time, there is no definitive data on the impact of the COVID-19 on fertility, pregnancy, childbirth or transmission of disease to newborns. We simply do not know and cannot verify that there is no impact or any specific impact on pregnancy, fetuses or neonates.

- **There is currently no scientific evidence showing that COVID-19 is transmitted to or carried by oocytes (eggs) or sperm.**
- **There is very little research on a pregnant woman's susceptibility to contracting COVID-19.** This means that no one can be certain if pregnant women are more likely to contract COVID-19 compared to a non-pregnant adult. In past pandemics, pregnant women were found to be at greater risk for infectious processes (due to the physiologic and immunologic changes of pregnancy), which may pose risks including miscarriage, stillbirth, and preterm birth.
- **There is little research (and no verified data) on pregnancy and COVID-19.** The few studies available are limited to the impact of COVID-19 on women in the second or third trimester of pregnancy. *There is no information on how COVID-19 affects women and unborn children in the first trimester of pregnancy.* Further, there may not be any significant data on pregnancy and COVID-19 in the near future as all information takes time to collect and evaluate. There is no current approved treatment (medication) for COVID-19, and if a pregnant woman gets COVID-19, the current medication used to provide compassionate care to patients afflicted with COVID-19 is *contraindicated* for use in pregnancy.
- **There is very little information on the transmission of COVID-19 to fetuses.** The small amount of data reported out of Wuhan, China and New York does not show any definitive evidence of intrauterine fetal infections with COVID-19; therefore, it is believed that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to a fetus in utero is low or non-existent. Reported cases (3) of infected newborns have fortunately had good recoveries, although how they were infected is still not clear. However, an infected mother can transmit the virus to her infant after birth through respiratory droplets. While breast feeding is still possible, masks and hand hygiene are essential. Some hospitals are restricting partners at deliveries and except for breastfeeding social distancing between mothers and newborns is advocated in some areas.
- **Professional organizations recommend that patients do not try to get pregnant during the COVID-19 outbreak.** The American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE), to name two, are taking an abundantly cautious approach and, therefore, advise that all fertility patients considering or planning treatment, even if they do not meet the diagnostic criteria for a COVID-19 infection, should avoid becoming pregnant at this time. For those patients already having treatment, the organizations suggest considering deferred pregnancy with oocyte or embryo freezing for later embryo transfer.

## AGREEMENT AND CONSENT TO TREATMENT

I/We understand that by signing this consent I/we knowingly and voluntarily, and with the full understanding of the unknown consequences related to COVID-19 infections, wish to continue my/our fertility testing and treatment during the current COVID-19 outbreak and its aftermath.

I/We agree and acknowledge that 1) I/we made the decision to continue with my/our fertility cycle freely and voluntarily; 2) I/we were given alternatives to continuing this treatment and the opportunity to discuss my/our treatment with the treating physician; and 3) neither the treating physician, the clinic or its staff directly or indirectly influenced my/our decision to continue treatment at this time.

I/We are aware and accept that I/we may be exposed to COVID-19 at any time during treatment, either while pursuing diagnostic testing/treatment at this clinic location or otherwise at home or in public, regardless of any safety measures that are in place. **It is my/our sole responsibility to inform the treating physician if I/we or anyone in our household is directly exposed to COVID-19, are diagnosed with COVID-19, or display symptoms which could possibly be from a COVID-19 infection (even in the absence of a positive COVID-19 test). If this situation occurs, I/we agree that any treatment cycle will be immediately cancelled.**

I/We further understand and agree that there is no guarantee that, even though I/we are planning fertility treatment, the treatment/cycle will occur at this time or that the treatment cycle will continue to completion. If my/our treatment is stopped for any of the reasons noted in this document, I/we understand that I/we will still be responsible for paying for the services that have been provided and that any monies paid to date, including the cost of medication, will not be reimbursed.

### **By requesting to continue treatment, I/we accept the following:**

- Information on COVID-19 is still evolving and we understand that 1) federal, state and local authorities may restrict business activities, including fertility treatment and medical procedures, 2) professional guidelines may advise against such medical interventions, and 3) our treating physicians, using their best medical judgement, may determine that it is not safe to proceed. We understand that if any of these situations occur, treatment will stop and we will be given further instructions for fertility care.
- The clinic may not be able to support treatment cycles as a result of staffing, equipment and/or supply shortages, infection risk, or government mandate.
- In order to protect all personnel and patients from transmission of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible, the clinic may initiate and maintain additional strict policies and procedures that will govern how, when and where diagnostic testing/treatment is provided, which may require the use of alternate personnel, equipment and locations. These policies and procedures are required for safety reasons and will not be negotiable for individual scheduling and convenience. The use of additional policies related to COVID-19 will not, in any manner, negate any other clinic policies that may also be in place or initiated.

**The safest course is to avoid attempting pregnancy at this time. We urge all patients to keep up to date with the CDC recommendations. You can visit their website for frequent updates at <https://www.cdc.gov>.**

