

# Virtual Care in Antenatal Care and the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 brought challenges to many sectors of life, including healthcare. In the pace of the current pandemic, the usual face-to-face interaction between physician and patient, health services diverted to virtual care across diverse domains of healthcare, including antenatal services. Virtual care has its pros and cons in antenatal care. Evidence suggests that virtual care in antenatal care is an easy-to-approach intervention specifically in low-risk pregnancies. Despite its limitations, virtual care not only provides safe antenatal care but helps in minimizing the spread of the SARS CoV-2 virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Antenatal care; Virtual care; COVID-19; SARS CoV-2; Pandemic

## EDITORIAL

The current pandemic of COVID-19, which started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus-2 (SARS CoV-2), affected millions worldwide that affects every sector of life, as health is the most. The COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 [1]. The use of virtual care across different domains of healthcare including antenatal services, gain popularity during the pandemic to maintain service provision while keeping social distancing, a gold standard of virus spread containment.

The only way to minimize doctor-patient interaction and in-person visits is by providing care services virtually, which will help to reduce the virus spread [2]. Virtual care could be a broad term that encompasses all the ways that health care providers; remotely act with their patients. Additionally, treating patients via telemedicine, healthcare providers might use live video, audio, and instant texting to speak with their patients remotely. Simply; put the term virtual care; could be a method of talking concerning all the ways that patients and doctors will use digital tools to interact in real-time.

Antenatal care is a core part of maternity care where; the healthcare provider has a close watch on pregnancy and its related complications like gestational diabetes, hypertension, and any on-towards effects; but this care is challenging specifically in the current COVID-19 pandemic. With the on-off application of moments restrictions, social distancing, and other preventive measurements, the care services are affected more at the primary level where antenatal services; are commonly provided.

Evidence suggests that pregnant women are more susceptible to

SARS CoV-2 infections as compared to the general population not only due to their immunocompromised status but other pregnancy-related physiological changes that may play a role [3]. Thus there is a need for change in the usual approach of antenatal care and to be adjusted while considering the prevention strategies for SARS CoV-2 spread on one side, without compromising antenatal care on the other. Virtual care has its pros and cons that include but not limited to [4];

### Pros

- Effective in low-risk pregnancies
- Routine physician consultation
- Elimination of non-essential in-person consultations
- Prescribing commonly used medications in pregnancy, like, food supplements, folic acids
- Psychosocial counseling
- Birth preparedness classes via video conferencing in groups
- Sharing routine laboratory results

### Cons

- High-risk pregnancy
- Unavailability of infrastructure
- Technological illiteracy
- Financial barriers (low-income-countries and families)
- Language barriers

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- Remote monitoring limitations
- Limited doctor-patient bonding
- Distrust from the patient over services

In summary, although virtual care has its pros and cons in the pace of antenatal care, it may still be a safe and easy to avail service in the pace of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide safe antenatal care for those in need of the service which will not only minimize the number of non-essential antenatal visits and SARS CoV-2 transmission but will screen those in need of “urgent care” and guide them for the proper healthcare service they require.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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