

PATIENT & VISITOR NOTICE: CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Background:

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads, the severity of illness it causes and to what extent it may spread within the United States. SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, China and has spread rapidly throughout the world, including within the U.S. The disease it causes is named “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated “COVID-19”). Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness and common symptoms include fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, which may develop 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Many infected and contagious individuals may only have mild symptoms or, more rarely, may not have symptoms at all. Complications include, but may not be limited to, pneumonia, multi-organ failure and in some cases death. There is currently no vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. Medical interventions are focused on the control of symptoms and supportive care of complications.

The virus is thought to spread mainly between people in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may also be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching his or her own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes. People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic, although the virus is also spread by people who are infected but not showing any symptoms. There may also be unknown or uncommon routes of COVID-19 transmission, symptoms and/or complications.

Ways to help reduce the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses include avoiding non-essential travel (within and outside of the U.S.), avoiding close contact with people who are sick, avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth, covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, staying home when sick, practicing frequent and thorough hand washing and disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces.

Current travel-related information is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

As per CDC guidance, all non-essential travel should be avoided. After leaving an area with a level 3 travel health notice, stay home, avoid contact with others and monitor for COVID-19 symptoms. It's important to understand that COVID-19 has become widespread even within the U.S., so the risks cannot be completely eliminated strictly by avoiding travel.

If an individual has a known exposure to COVID-19 and/or develops a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, cough and/or shortness of breath, he or she should avoid contact with others and seek medical advice (call ahead before going to a doctor's office or ER). This symptom list may not be all-inclusive; therefore, individuals should consult their primary care providers with any symptoms that are concerning or if they are otherwise not feeling well.

Reproduction & Pregnancy:

Per the Food and Drug Administration (FDA): While respiratory viruses, in general, are not known to be transmitted by implantation, transplantation, infusion or transfer of human cells, tissues, or cellular or tissue-based products (HCT/Ps) such as eggs, semen and embryos, the potential for transmission of COVID-19 by HCT/Ps is unknown at this time.

Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): It is not yet known:

- Whether pregnant women have a greater chance of getting sick from COVID-19 than the general public, nor whether they are more likely to have serious illness as a result. (However, we do know that pregnant women experience changes in their bodies that may increase their risk of some infections. With viruses from the same family as COVID-19, as well as other viral respiratory infections such as influenza, women have had a higher risk of developing severe illness).
- Whether a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can pass the virus to her fetus or baby during pregnancy or delivery.
- Whether COVID-19 would cause problems during pregnancy or affect the health of the baby after birth.

Per the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM): The risks of infection for a pregnant woman who develops COVID-19 are still relatively unknown. However, other known coronavirus infections during pregnancy (such as SARS) have been associated with spontaneous miscarriage, preterm delivery and intrauterine growth restriction.

Emerging data shows that there may be an increased risk of certain adverse pregnancy outcomes associated with COVID-19 infection, such as preeclampsia, miscarriage, pre-term labor, need for cesarean section and even perinatal death.

ASRM guidelines and Vios clinical policies:

On 3/17/20, ASRM released a guidance document entitled “Patient Management and Clinical Recommendations During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” (<https://www.asrm.org/globalassets/asrm/asrm-content/news-and-publications/covidtaskforce.pdf>) These guidelines are expected to change as the pandemic evolves, but currently suggest the following:

- Patients who are already on fertility medications for an IVF cycle may consider proceeding to egg retrieval, but strong consideration should be given to postponing services that may immediately result in pregnancy (i.e. embryo transfer, IUI).
- Initiation of any *new* treatment cycles (other than for urgent gamete preservation), non-urgent diagnostic procedures and elective surgeries should be suspended.
- In-person interactions should be minimized, and the use of telehealth should be increased.

Vios recommends that our patients follow ASRM guidelines. We are committed to helping our patients make thoughtful decisions about their care within the context of the guidelines as well as their individual circumstances. We are ready and available for consultations via telemedicine, and some of our offices are currently open to patients without known COVID-19 risk factors(*) for pre-arranged, urgent(**) services. Patients without known COVID-19 risk factors who wish to proceed with these services may do so after consulting with the Vios healthcare team and completing the COVID-19 consent form.

**COVID-19 risk factors include any of the following:*

- *If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 (i.e. a positive COVID-19 test result).*
- *If you have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, cough and/or shortness of breath or if you are otherwise not feeling well.*
- *If, within the past 14 days, you have had a known exposure to COVID-19 (even if you have no symptoms)*
- *If, within the past 14 days, you have left an area with a level 3 travel health notice.*

***Examples of urgent services include:*

- *Monitoring and egg retrieval for patients already on preparatory medications and/or for those with impending treatments which will compromise their reproductive potential, such as chemotherapy. (We strongly recommend postponing services which may immediately result in pregnancy, such as embryo transfer or IUI).*
- *Diagnostic testing needed in order to determine whether urgent fertility treatment is necessary, such as in the case of severely diminished ovarian reserve. The diagnostic workup (i.e. ultrasound, labs, semen analysis and SIS if needed) should be consolidated to one visit and the patient should have a follow-up telemedicine visit scheduled with the Provider to discuss results.*
- *Imaging studies and/or procedures for concerns such as retained products of conception or endometrial hyperplasia. Consideration may also be given for patients already on preparatory medications for these services and/or who cannot move forward with pre-arranged treatments without these services being completed.*
- *Early pregnancy monitoring. This will generally be limited to three serial blood draws for HCG/P4 + one ultrasound at approximately 6 ½ -- 7 ½ weeks gestation, unless otherwise advised by the Provider (i.e. if there is an abnormal HCG rise/suspected ectopic pregnancy, concerning bleeding or history of recurrent pregnancy loss).*

Patients who develop COVID-19 risk factors should stay home and notify us immediately. We will discuss the plan for fertility services based upon the specific risk factor(s), treatment plan and the COVID-19 guidelines in place at that time. For the patient’s safety and that of our staff and other patients, we may need to reschedule on-site appointments and/or cancel the entire treatment cycle.

Additionally, Vios is temporarily consolidating its offices and it may become necessary to cease operations altogether, due to our staff’s health, evolving guidelines and/or legal mandates. Vios cannot guarantee that our patients’ fertility services will not be interrupted or postponed during this pandemic, even if they do not personally develop risk factors. The potential consequences of this include but are not limited to the loss of funds spent on services and medications and possible difficulty in accessing care to address any complications that may arise. Patients should consider this carefully as they make decisions about their care.

IMPORTANT: Patients in a gestational carrier arrangement who do not live within close proximity of each other should understand that travel may be restricted, and the Intended Parents may therefore be unable to join their newborn(s) in a timely manner. All involved parties must ensure that their legal agreement includes a plan to address this possibility.

Vios has implemented the following precautionary measures, for the health and safety of our patients and staff:

- 1) Non-patient visitors may not enter any Vios office.
- 2) All patients will be asked about COVID-19 risk factors at the time of scheduling each appointment.

Patients without risk factors will be scheduled, but **must call back** to report risk factors which become evident before the appointment. Patients have the opportunity to speak with a Vios Provider or Nurse prior to confirming the appointment.

Patients with risk factors will speak with a Vios Provider or Nurse. We will ask the patient to stay home; next steps related to fertility services will be based upon the specific risk factor(s), treatment plan and the COVID-19 guidelines in place at that time.

- 3) Patients should arrive 5-10 minutes before the scheduled appointment time and wait in the car until called by a Patient Coordinator. At that time, the patient will be screened again for COVID-19 risk factors.

Patients without risk factors will be asked to come into the office and wait in designated “stations” within the waiting room (stations are 6+ ft apart; the number of stations available is dependent upon the size of the waiting room). If a patient appears ill, his or her temperature may be taken per Vios provider, nurse or MA discretion.

Patients with risk factors will be asked to continue waiting in the car. A Vios provider or nurse will call with next steps.

- 4) Other than in rare, pre-approved circumstances, companions may not come into the office unless they are also Vios patients receiving scheduled services, in which case the same risk factors and screening procedures apply.
- 5) We will be limiting each patient’s time in the office, providing efficient but quality care.

Although precautionary measures are being taken, we cannot guarantee that no person within our offices is infected with COVID-19; patients who choose to proceed with services on Vios premises do so at their own risk.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns about how COVID-19 may affect your fertility services. Call the number of the office at which you typically attend doctor appointments. Office hours are Monday-Friday 8:00 am-4:00 pm Central. After hours, call the same number and choose the option for the “On-Call Provider.” <https://viosfertility.com/locations-doctors/>

Please stay up-to-date on the most recent CDC guidance about COVID-19 by visiting the following site: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

We look forward to helping you build your family as quickly and safely as possible.