

Information on Birth partners accompanying pregnant women in labour, amidst COVID-19 epidemic

We know how important support from a partner is during the maternity journey. Therefore, we want you to be with your chosen support person while still making sure that infection control and health and safety policies are being followed, to keep everyone safe throughout the process.

Q. Will I be able to have my birth partner(s) with me during labour and birth?

Yes, you should be encouraged to have one birth partner present with you during labour and birth. Your birth partner must wear a mask throughout his/her time in hospital.

Having at least one trusted birth partner present throughout labour, is known to make a significant difference to the safety and wellbeing of women in childbirth.

If the individual has symptoms of coronavirus, has recently tested positive for coronavirus or is required to self-isolate or quarantine for other reasons (e.g. recent contact of an infected person), they should not be selected as the birth partner to protect the mothers, the children and the staff of the maternity service.

We know that for some women, their chosen birth partner may be from a different household due to their individual circumstances. You should be supported to have them with you, unless they are unwell with coronavirus symptoms or have tested positive for coronavirus.

Q. Will I be able to have my birth partner(s) with me if I am being induced?

No, we understand this must be a very worrying and anxious time if you are pregnant and your birth partner cannot be with you while you are being induced. However, this guidance is in place to protect other pregnant women and babies and birth partners themselves, as well as maternity staff.

Please be assured that if your chosen birth partner is unable to be with you on a ward during your

induction, this will not impact on your birth partner's presence during labour and the birth.

At the point you go into what is called active labour, your birth partner will be able to join you then onwards.

Q. Will I be able to have a birth partner with me on postnatal ward?

Visiting is still subject to local discretion by the Health Care Agency – please check with your maternity unit for their policy on visitors to the postnatal wards.

There is a possibility that visitor restrictions may be in force in response to an increase in the local or national transmission risk. We understand that not having a birth partner with you on the postnatal ward after you have given birth may be upsetting for you both but these restrictions are in place, where necessary to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus to you, your baby, the maternity staff and birth partners themselves.

Please be reassured that during this time, midwifery, obstetric and support staff will do their best to support the needs of all women and the practical challenges of caring for new-born babies after birth.

As the local COVID-19 risks reduce, the no-visitors policy is expected to be reviewed. Once visitors are permitted, it is important that all visitors follow guidance in hospitals about social distancing, wearing a face covering and regular hand washing.

Q. What is the advice for birth partners during the coronavirus pandemic?

During the coronavirus pandemic, all hospitals have been restricting visitors, but there has always been an exception for a well birthing partner during active labour and birth. We are asking you to follow the guidance below to keep yourself, your family, other families and Health care Agency staff as safe as possible during the labour process:

- Your partner will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and fever each time they enter the maternity service.
- Birth partners will be required to wear a mask or face covering when entering a hospital and

throughout their time in the hospital, including the labour room.

- Every woman, if she so wishes, should be able to have at least one birth partner stay with her through active phase of labour and birth.
- To help prevent spread of coronavirus to other women, their babies and key front-line healthcare staff, it is very important that you do not attend the maternity unit if you:
 - Have any (even mild) symptoms of coronavirus.
 - Have been categorized as a close contact of a person who has had COVID-19 within the preceding 14 days.
 - Have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the preceding 14 days.
- In view of this, women and their current birth partner(s) are being encouraged to think about an alternative birth partner(s), if required. This person does not need to be from the same household as you.
- If you are supporting a woman during labour and birth, please be aware of the strict infection control procedures in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus to other pregnant women and their babies, as well as other people within the hospital and the maternity staff.
 - Please wash your hands regularly with soap and water and use hand sanitiser gel in clinical areas as available.
 - If you cough or sneeze, please cover your mouth with a tissue and dispose of it in a bin immediately.
 - If you are asked to wear any additional personal protective equipment (PPE) in addition to a mask or face covering during the labour or birth, please follow the instructions carefully and take it off before you leave the clinical area.
 - Where you need to drink or eat, since it involves removing the mask, please exit the labour room, and find a separate area for same, away from other people.
- If you are accompanying a woman to her birth, please be aware that Labour room staff will be wearing PPE and it may be more difficult for them to communicate with you:
 - A staff member will be allocated to support you; please carefully follow their instructions and talk to them (from a distance as much as possible,

with mask-on) if you have any questions.

- To enable the clinical staff to do their job, it is very important that you do not move around the labour room.
- The maternity team will do everything they can to enable you to be present for the birth. However, if there is a particular safety concern, they may ask that you are not present in the labour room. If this is the case, the team should discuss this with you and explain their reasons unless it is an emergency.
- Once the baby is born you will not be allowed to move around from the labour room except exit to sitting area outside and note that you will not be allowed back in the labour room.

We understand this is a stressful and anxious time for pregnant women, birth partners and their families and we thank you for your cooperation during this time. Please be assured that the maternity team will do all they can to provide information, guidance and support to you and the woman giving birth.

For further queries, please contact your midwife from your respective ANC clinic.