

Coronavirus: Planning your birth

NHS

You and your baby's wellbeing is our priority and we are doing all we can to ensure maternity services are personal and safe.

If you are concerned about your health or the health of your unborn baby, please contact your midwife or maternity team.

During the coronavirus pandemic, your birth experience still matters. You should be supported to have a safe and positive birth experience, whether you have coronavirus or not.

You can expect:

- to be treated with dignity and respect
- to have a birth partner of your choice
- to have access to pain relief options
- to make informed decisions about your birth
- to have clear communication from maternity staff
- to plan to give birth in a setting that is right for you
- to be mobile where possible and give birth in the position of your choice.

Planning your birth experience will help you to feel prepared. We would encourage you to document your plans for birth in whatever way you choose as the maternity team will be led by this to ensure the care they provide meets your individual needs.

Temporary changes to maternity services

Some temporary changes to maternity services may be necessary at this time to keep you and your baby safe.

This is because we may have fewer maternity staff available. You should be able to find out about any temporary changes to your local maternity services from your midwife or maternity team. Your local maternity service may also have a website or social media page that is regularly updated. Local maternity services should be making decisions about any temporary changes in partnership with women and their families. This can be done through the local Maternity Voices Partnership.

If you have possible or confirmed coronavirus

As yet there is no evidence that having coronavirus affects whether you will have a vaginal or a caesarean birth. If you have possible or confirmed coronavirus symptoms, which include a temperature and a new or persistent cough, you will be advised to give birth in an obstetric unit. This is so the maternity team looking after you can monitor you and your baby closely and respond quickly if necessary.

You will be cared for in a dedicated area in the maternity unit to keep you and everybody using or working in our services as safe as possible.

You may notice that midwives and the maternity team are wearing protective clothing, such as aprons, masks or eye protection. These measures protect you, your baby and the staff caring for you, and reduce the risk of spreading infection.



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It is not recommended that you labour or give birth in a birthing pool, because poo in the water, which sometimes happens during birth, can pass coronavirus to your baby or the staff caring for you. After the birth, you will be encouraged to have skin-to-skin contact with your baby as normal, unless your baby is unwell and needs care in the neonatal unit.

Skin-to-skin contact keeps your baby warm, regulates their breathing, supports bonding and helps babies learn to feed. There is no evidence that coronavirus can be passed to your baby in breastmilk. The benefits of breastfeeding and the protection it offers to babies outweigh any potential risks of transmission of coronavirus through breastmilk.

If you have questions or concerns at any time, please contact your midwife or maternity team.

Where to give birth

If you and your baby are well, you can usually choose to give birth at home or in a freestanding or alongside midwifery-led unit or birth centre. This is a safe option for many women – as set out in National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance (www.nice.org.uk). If there are complications with your pregnancy, you may be advised to give birth in an obstetric unit. It is always important to have a midwife with you when you give birth.

During the coronavirus pandemic, some maternity services may not be able to provide a homebirth service or the option to give birth in a midwifery-led unit. Local temporary changes are only made following a detailed safety assessment and when all alternative options have been explored. Maternity services rely on having enough staff, and availability of an ambulance should it be needed, to keep you and your baby safe. If these cannot be guaranteed and temporary changes have been made to your local maternity services, your midwife or maternity team will discuss your choices with you.

Please contact your midwife or maternity team for up-to-date information on your options for where you can plan to give birth.

Birthing partners and visitors

We know that having a trusted birth partner during labour make a big difference to the safety and wellbeing of women during labour and birth.

You will be supported to have a birth partner with you during your labour and birth, providing they do not have symptoms of coronavirus. In case your first choice gets symptoms, do think about asking someone else to be your birth partner if this happens.

This could be a friend, family member or a doula, again providing they do not have symptoms. This is important to ensure the safety of other women and babies and the staff who will be caring for you.

If you have a planned or emergency caesarean, the maternity team will do everything they can to allow your birth partner to be present in the operating theatre. This is risk assessed locally and may not always be possible, especially where there are particular safety concerns, or if you or your partner have possible or confirmed coronavirus. Your midwife or maternity team will discuss this with you and keep you informed.

Maternity units may limit visitors at routine antenatal appointments, including scans. Visitors to antenatal or postnatal areas may be limited or not allowed, to ensure social distancing can be maintained to keep you and your baby, other women and their families and the maternity staff supporting you as safe as possible. If you have additional support needs or require access to interpretation services, your midwife or maternity team will plan this with you.