

SUPPORTING HOMEBIRTH DURING A HEALTH PANDEMIC

A likely consequence of the current COVID-19 pandemic will be an increased number of women choosing to stay at home for the birth of their baby.

This has been observed in other countries around the world who have experienced an outbreak of community COVID-19 infection before us.

With current hospital recommendations restricting the number of people women can have with them during their birth, along with increased anxiety about being around other people and in foreign environments, it is not hard to see why some women will feel more comfortable staying at home.

Homebirth is a safe and reasonable option for healthy mothers and babies, and criteria for supporting homebirth should be considered similarly to the admission criteria for primary birthing units.

If women or their babies have indications for obstetric involvement, they should be advised to go to the hospital for their birth.

If homebirth is not a usual part of your midwifery practice, you may feel unsure about how best to support this. Reach out to your midwifery colleagues – there will be other midwives in your region who will help to support you with preparing for attending a homebirth.

Some tips for your own preparation:

- Ensure you have a well stocked homebirth bag, including resuscitation equipment, oxygen cylinder, uterotonic drugs, sterile gloves, IV equipment, torch, mirror, inco sheets, sterilised suture sets and cord scissors, and episiotomy scissors. This is not an exhaustive list, and likely you would include other items in your bag too. You will also need a WellChild book and heelprick card for the baby.
- Bring your own cellphone, charger, food, and drinks with you, along with handwashing supplies
- Arrange a back up midwife to be available to attend the homebirth with you. If you are feeling you need support during the labour, negotiate with her to attend for longer than just the time around birth
- Read the NZ College of Midwives statement on supporting normal birth
- Provide women with a list of things to gather for the birth (see below for an example)
- Ensure you know how to complete reporting requirements after the birth, including notification to Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and registration of baby on the NIR.
- Make sure you know the processes for calling for ambulance support if an emergency occurs (but don't call them just to attend a normal birth or for a non-urgent transfer), and also familiarise yourself with the direct dial lines for neonatal support, birthing suite etc.

Suggested items the woman should gather for a homebirth:

6-8 clean towels

Some hand towels and facecloths

One large and two small plastic bags for rubbish

A large birth mat (see below)

Clothes and nappies for baby

Maternity pads and underwear

A good heater for the room

A container for the placenta (an ice cream container is ideal)

To make a birth mat:

Lay down a large plastic (waterproof) sheet, or small tarpaulin

Place newspaper or old blankets/duvet inner on top

Place one clean old sheet or soft blanket on top

Seal all four edges with strong duct tape