

Information for birthing partners

This leaflet is to provide information for those who have been chosen by an expectant mother to be a birthing partner during her labour.

Introduction

We know that being invited to be a birthing partner can be both an exciting and perhaps a frightening experience for you. It may be that you have been present at a birth before and you are quite comfortable with what to expect, but if not, this leaflet is intended to help you understand why the staff ask you to do (or not to do) certain things whilst you are in the Maternity Unit. We ask that the number of birthing partners is limited to two, as this helps both the labouring woman and the professionals form a small and supportive group during the birthing process. We ask that other family members and friends do not ask to visit during labour, and stay at home until the new family has been transferred to the postnatal ward. The same two birthing partners will only be allowed in when labour is in progress.

It is important for everyone's safety that you are tested for COVID-19. The test will ensure neither of you nor the person you are supporting are infected – not all people with COVID-19 show symptoms, but they can still pass the virus on to others. If we know that you have COVID-19 we can ensure you have the appropriate care required. You should complete lateral flow tests twice a week for the duration of the pregnancy and until the midwife discharges you from her care once the baby has arrived.

You can order lateral flow tests for yourself via the government website. The test kit will be posted to your home address. This is also the link that you will use to report your results.

<https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>.

Car parking

The area up the ramp immediately outside the Maternity Unit is for dropping off only and wait time is limited to 30 minutes in one of the marked bays. Please respect the time limit and be aware that emergency vehicles such as ambulances and the WestCall emergency doctor cars must be able to pull into their designated bays at all times.

We can give one parking permit to the birth partners of each woman. Please keep your parking ticket that you receive on entering the car park safe. When you are ready to leave the hospital please ask the midwife for your parking permit for you to take to security so that they will validate your parking ticket free of charge.

Video entry phones

We have these at every ward entry as they are intended to keep both women and new babies safe from unwanted intrusion, theft of personal items and even possible abduction. We realise these may seem an inconvenience, having to wait to be 'buzzed in', so it is sensible to keep the number of trips off the ward to a small number. We don't always have a receptionist at the desk

as she/he may have gone to collect notes, or relay a message to staff, and it may be that the midwives are also busy with a women or baby.

Telephone calls

Please remember to bring your chargers! If you need to make or receive calls, please leave the birthing room, but do not chat in the Delivery Suite / Rushey corridors as you may get in the way of an emergency. Please step out of the ward, or better still, ask family and friends in advance to not ask for hourly updates.

The staff are not permitted to give information to anyone who phones the wards as we have no way of confirming their identity. We are bound by legal requirements to maintain patient confidentiality.

Food and drinks

Whilst your partner is in labour it is important for you to keep hydrated and to eat, as a low blood sugar makes people more prone to fainting, and if you are very hungry you may find it difficult to be as supportive as you would like to be. The NHS does not provide meals for family members, but there are shops, vending machines and various hot food outlets around the hospital site where you can go for a meal break, or you can bring in your own picnic type food in a chiller bag. We have no facilities to store food in refrigerators on either Delivery Suite or the Midwifery-led Birth Unit. If the baby is going to be born in theatre it is VITAL that you have eaten before accompanying her as many people feel very faint in an operating theatre, and if you pass out, you will miss the birth of the baby.

Delivery by Caesarean birth or an assisted vaginal delivery in theatre

There is a one in four chance that the baby will be born in the Maternity theatre suite. Birthing partners are welcome, but we can only allow one person to accompany the mother. You will be asked to change into theatre pyjamas and footwear. Other than underwear and head coverings worn for religious reasons, no other clothing is permitted.

You may bring a camera and a wallet into theatre, but other personal possessions should be left where the midwife advises you to store them.

When you are in theatre, it is important that you listen to what the doctors and midwives ask you to do. Usually, we will ask you to sit on a seat at the mother's side. A lot of sterile equipment will need to be opened and some members of the team will be dressed in sterile clothing. If you accidentally bump into these people or equipment, we will then have to open a new set, which causes delays as well as being very expensive.

We understand that you are concerned for the mother and the baby, so if you feel scared or unwell, please say so, and someone will escort you out of theatre to a quieter place.

Very rarely, we may need to ask you to leave theatre. If this happens, someone will escort you to another room and explain what is happening. A senior member of the team will discuss events with you as soon as they are able to do so, but care of the mother and baby are our first priority. You are welcome to discuss any of the above information prior to the birth.

After the birth of the baby

Most mothers and babies will remain on the Delivery Suite for three hours or so before being transferred to the postnatal wards. Mothers who give birth on Rushey Ward usually stay a little longer, but most are discharged home from there, and not transferred to a postnatal bed. Whilst we are very happy for you to accompany your new family to the ward, it is usual for you to leave them so that everyone can get some rest. If there are particular reasons why a partner needs to stay, we will endeavour to accommodate this, but generally we anticipate that partners will be visiting between 9am and 9pm. Your second birthing partner can visit between 2pm – 6pm.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

J Siddall, Consultant Obstetrician August 2005

Reviewed: November 2021

Next review due: November 2023