

The critically ill mother

This leaflet explains what happens when a mother has been 'critically unwell' due to complications during pregnancy or when giving birth. It explains what to expect in the first few days and weeks after delivery. If there is anything you do not understand or if you have any questions, please speak to your midwife or doctor.

What is 'critically ill'?

There are a number of conditions or situations where a mother may be described as 'critically ill'. These women need care from senior medical staff, and midwives or nurses with a postgraduate qualification in High Dependency Nursing (in accordance with Trust practice), and will spend time (usually 12-48 hours either before and / or after the birth of their baby in a room on Delivery Suite or in the Intensive Care Unit.

The illnesses or complications which demand such a high level of expertise in providing care include:

- Eclampsia (seizures linked to high blood pressure)
- Severe pre-eclampsia (very high blood pressure, heavy proteinuria – protein in the urine)
- HELLP syndrome (a liver disorder)
- Blood loss over 1.5 litres either before, during or after delivery
- Sepsis (severe infections)
- Pulmonary embolus (clot in the lungs)

Where will I be cared for?

Typically, about one mother a month (or in 500 birth) will need to be admitted to Intensive Care (ICU) and up to ten a month (1 in 50 births) may need High Dependency Care on Delivery Suite.

Mothers who are well enough to be cared for ON Delivery Suite will be seen at least three times a day by the Delivery Suite co-ordinator (a senior midwife) and the duty obstetrician (doctor specialising in pregnancy and birth). Consultant obstetricians, consultant anaesthetists and consultant pathologists (blood or infection specialists) will be closely involved in planning care. Mothers who need intensive care will be seen several times a day by the consultant from the Intensive Care Unit and at least daily by a consultant

obstetrician and a midwife.

Assuming that your baby is both old enough and well enough not to need to be on the Special Care Baby Unit (Buscot Ward), he or she can stay with you in the Maternity Unit, but cannot be with you in Intensive Care, as you will be unable to look after your baby. It may not be possible for you to breastfeed your baby while you are unwell, but the midwives and maternity care assistants will give support to you and your partner with feeding and it may be possible to establish breastfeeding later if you wish..

We will try to explain what is happening to you, and what we expect to happen in the next few hours when we do our ward rounds. We cannot discuss your care with your partner or other members of the family unless you give permission, and ideally we would do this face to face at your bedside.

Moving from ICU or high dependency care:

When you are well enough to no longer need 'one to one' care, we will transfer you to the postnatal ward.

Follow up appointment:

An appointment will be arranged with a consultant in 6-8 week's time to talk about your experiences around the time of your baby's birth when you were critically unwell. We hope this will help you to have a better understanding of what happened. If you have any questions about what happened please note them down before that appointment and bring them with you to the clinic.

Contact information

Postnatal helpline 0300 330 0773 or contact your midwife or community health visitor.

Further information:

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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Reviewed: June 2014, July 2016, August 2018

Approved: Maternity Information Group & Patient Information Manager, October 2018

Review due: October 2020