



Care during pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: Frequently asked questions and answers

We understand that that this is a confusing, uncertain and scary time. We are saddened to be having to make difficult decisions about the way your care is provided and would like to assure you that all decisions are carefully considered and made to protect you, your baby, your family and our staff.

We will be working closely with Reading Maternity Voices Partnership to ensure information is communicated to you as quickly as possible.

Contents:

Section 1: Antenatal appointments with the community midwives and GP	p.2
Stop Smoking Services	p.3
Section 2: Antenatal appointment within the hospital	p.4
Help available if self-isolating	p.5
Self-isolating if you have diabetes	p.5
<u>The importance of seeking medical advice if you are worried</u>	p.6
Will I be tested for Coronavirus?	p.6
Section 3: Antenatal admissions to hospital	p.6
Section 4: Labour and birth	p.7
Section 5: Labour information specific to women with suspected or confirmed C19	p.8
Section 6: Homebirth	p.9
Section 7: Induction of labour	p.9
Section 8: Planned Caesarean section	p.10
Section 9: Postnatal stay on the ward	p.11
Section 10: Postnatal care at home	p.12
What will staff be wearing	p.13
Section 11: Your baby	p.13
Section 12: Looking after your mental health	p.14
Additional information and resources	p.14
Infant feeding links	p.14

Section 1: Antenatal appointments with the community midwife

If you are offered a face to face appointment, we strongly recommend that you attend. The maternity team will only recommend a face to face appointment if the need for the appointment is greater than your risk of being exposed to Coronavirus. [Click here](#) for advice from the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists regarding Coronavirus in pregnancy

1) Will routine appointments with my community midwife still take place?

YES – you will be asked to wear a face mask or face covering. If you don't have a face covering / mask you will be supplied with a mask: The national recommendation is to continue with most antenatal appointments to ensure that both mother and baby are well. The schedule of antenatal care during this time of COVID-19 had been adjusted slightly; the schedule of care is detailed below. For women that have particular needs the schedule of appointments may look slightly different; your midwife or obstetricians (doctors) will explain this to you. (the care schedule below starts on the 22/06/2020)

- 8 – 10 weeks: Your booking appointment will take place over the phone; you will be given a phone number to call to make your scan appointment.
- 8-10 week blood test with a maternity support worker
- 12 week scan, fetal screening blood test, blood pressure, weight & height
- 16 weeks: appointment with midwife
- 18-22 weeks: anomaly ultrasound scan
- 25 weeks: first time mothers only, appointment with your GP
- 28 weeks: midwife appointment for all women.
- 31 weeks: first time mothers only, appointment with your GP
- 34 weeks: midwife appointment for all women.
- 36 weeks: midwife appointment for all women.
- 38 weeks: midwife appointment for all women
- 40 weeks: first time mothers only, midwife appointment
- 41weeks: midwife appointment for all women.

NOTE:

If you're unable to attend your first scan or anomaly scan because you need to self-isolate or if you choose not to attend either of these scans the screening midwives will contact you directly.

Unless you hear from your community team please attend the appointments you currently have booked (unless you are unwell or having to self-isolate). The community team will contact you a few days before your appointment to let you know if the location has changed and to ask you 4 questions:

- 1) Do you have a fever?
- 2) Do you have a new continuous cough?
- 3) Have you lost sense of smell or taste?
- 4) Are you self-isolating because you or someone in your home is showing symptoms of, or is confirmed to have, Coronavirus?

If your answer is 'yes' to any of the above 4 questions, we will need to rearrange your appointment.

2) What should I do if I have received a letter advising me to 'Shield'?

- Please follow the guidance in your letter.
- Please let your community midwife know.
- When you are called before appointments to be asked the Coronavirus screening questions please let the caller know that you met the clinical criteria for 'Shielding'.
- If you call the triage line, please let them know that you met the clinical criteria for 'Shielding'.
- If you need support while shielding, please register using the links below:

Public Health England option: [Click here.](#)

Option specific to pregnant women: [Click here.](#)

For more information about 'Shielding: [Click here.](#)

3) Can my partner or children attend my community appointments with me?

NO. We're really sorry, but in order to reduce the spread of the virus you will need to attend all appointments alone, regardless of the location. Your partner can join the appointments you have with community midwives via speaker phone (using your own mobile phone – we do not have conference call facilities).

4) Can I still access help to stop smoking?

YES. The most important action you can take to reduce the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth and restricted growth of your baby is to stop smoking.

It is particularly important during this pandemic that you and your partner stop smoking; smoking is associated with worse outcomes in those that contract the virus.

Smoking harms the immune system and reduces protection from infections like Coronavirus. Smokers are therefore at a greater risk of:

- Acute respiratory infections.

- Infections lasting longer.
- Infection being more serious than it would be for someone who does not smoke.

You or your midwife can still refer you to stop smoking services. The support during this time will take place over the phone or by video call. The service will continue to help you access stop smoking medication if required. Until further notice carbon monoxide testing has stopped.

[Click here](#) to self-refer to the stop smoking services.

Or call the Quit-line on 0118 449 2026

Or text Quit to 66777

Or use the app, Quit with Bella, www.quitwithbella.com

Twitter Quit Clinic: every day 7:30pm- 8:30pm #QuitforCovid

Section 2: Antenatal appointments in the hospital

If you are offered a face to face hospital appointment, we strongly recommend that you attend. The maternity team will only recommend a face to face appointment if the need for the appointment is greater than your risk of being exposed to Coronavirus.

1) Will the antenatal appointments I have booked at the hospital continue?

YES – See guidance below for safety precautions to be followed when attending hospital appointments: It is really important to us that you receive the care you need. To reduce the spread of the virus we have had to change the way some appointments are held. You are likely to be called a few days before all appointments so we can ask the 4 Coronavirus screening questions. If your answer is 'yes' to any of the questions, we will need to rearrange your appointment:

- 1) Do you have a fever?
- 2) Do you have a new continuous cough?
- 3) Have you lost sense of smell or taste?
- 4) Are you self-isolating because you or someone in your home is showing symptoms of, or is confirmed to have Coronavirus?

Antenatal appointments with obstetricians – You will receive a letter letting you know the date and time of your appointment and if the appointment will be face to face or over the phone/video call. The majority of appointments will take place over the phone/video call.

Obstetric appointments after a scan – If are due to have an appointment with an obstetrician after your scan you will be advised if the appointment will take place face to face or over the phone/video call. After the scan, a health care professional will check your blood pressure and urine, this information will be made available to the obstetrician.

Anti-D – These appointments will continue as planned, unless you are contacted and advised otherwise, or you answer yes to any of the Coronavirus screening questions.

Ultrasound scans – See guidance below for safety precautions to be followed when attending hospital appointments: Maternity ultrasound scans continue

Safety precautions to be followed when attending hospital appointment in maternity:

- 1) One person can attend hospital antenatal, Day Assessment and ultrasound scan appointments with you. If you choose to bring anyone to appointments with you, they must be the same person every time
- 2) Both yourself and partner must wear a face masks and observe hand hygiene at all times while in hospital
- 3) Yourself and partner must be without symptoms of coronavirus, not required to self-isolate, or had a recent positive coronavirus result
- 4) As the ultrasound department is small, and we need space out chairs in the waiting area to maintain social distancing, your partner will need to stand behind your chair
 - a. Your sonographer will tell you where your partner can sit or stand during the scan
 - b. If you need to attend antenatal clinic after your scan, you will need to follow the one-way system which is clearly signposted

2) *Is there any help available if I am self-isolating?*

YES. If you need to self-isolate as you or someone in your home has symptoms of Coronavirus, you can contact the NHS Volunteer responder support service. This volunteer service can help to collect shopping or medication, and offers a ‘telephone check in and chat’ service. For more details on this service, [click here](#).

There are also local groups you can contact for assistance:

- Reading: <https://www.reading.gov.uk/Coronavirussupport>
- Wokingham: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/health/public-health-campaigns/community-support-for-Coronavirus-covid-19/>
- West Berkshire: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/Coronavirus-communityhub>
- Henley and surrounding villages: www.henleymutualaid.org.uk

REMEMBER: If you are self-isolating it is important to stay mobile and hydrated

3) *Is there any advice about self-isolating when you have diabetes?*

- [Diabetes UK](#) has some excellent advice on their website about self-isolating if you have diabetes.
- If you have any concerns, please contact the Diabetic Team.

REMEMER: If you are self-isolating it is important to stay mobile and hydrated.

The importance of seeking medical advice if you are worried

If you are concerned about you or your baby's wellbeing, including your baby's movements, it is vital that you seek medical advice and care without delay.

We know this is a challenging time, particularly if you have concerns about your pregnancy and are worried about entering the hospital, but we are doing everything we can to minimise the spread of Coronavirus to healthy women and babies. It is very important to come to hospital when you and your baby need care. If you have any concerns, please call our triage line 0118 322 7304.

4) *Will I be tested for Coronavirus?*

YES. Since 27/04/2020 NHS England has asked that women who are going to stay in hospital for any reason during pregnancy, birth, or if they need to return to hospital after giving birth, are tested for Coronavirus. If you are having a planned caesarean section, you will be called approximately 2-3 before the caesarean section to attend a drive through testing centre. More information about testing can be [found here](#) in our leaflet.

Section 3: Antenatal admissions into hospital

1) *If I am admitted to hospital during my pregnancy will my partner be able to stay with me?*

NO. In order to reduce possible spread of the virus and keep everyone safe we are operating a restricted visiting policy. [Click here to view the visiting charter](#)

- During your antenatal admission you will be seen daily by a consultant obstetrician to assess yours and the baby's wellbeing and plan your care with you.
- If you require medication to take home with you, this will be organised while you are in hospital and ready for when you are discharged home

Section 4: Labour and birth

1) *Can my birthing partner stay with me when I am in labour?*

YES – birth partners will need to wear a face mask or face covering: When you are admitted to the Delivery Suite in labour your birthing partner can stay with you, **providing they are well.** It may be useful to have a back-up birthing partner. They do not have to be from the same household as you, but they do need to be well.

2) Will I be able to attend the Midwife Led Unit (MLU) when I am in labour?

It has saddened us very much to close the MLU. We are currently in phase 2 of re-opening the MLU. This means that on days when our staffing allows we are able to offer the MLU to women who are low risk and in labour. On the days that we can't offer the MLU you will be asked to attend the delivery suite for labour and birth. The midwives on the Delivery Suite are well able to provide low risk care and provide a home from home feel using birthing balls, peanut balls, aromatherapy, etc.

3) Can I still use the birthing pool?

YES. We will do our best to support women to use the birthing pool using our inflatable pool. It is worth mentioning that the pools can take a long time to fill. Using the pool isn't advised for women who are suspected to have or are confirmed to have Coronavirus.

4) Can I have an epidural?

YES. We will continue to provide an epidural service.

- If there is going to be a delay in siting an epidural due to the availability of the anaesthetist, the midwife will let you know and do her best to keep you updated. The midwife can explore other options for pain relief with you while you are waiting.
- For women who are symptomatic of or confirmed to have Coronavirus and thinking of having an epidural, we would advise requesting to have the epidural sited sooner rather than later. This is because the epidural procedure will take longer due to the way staff need to work in rooms when Coronavirus is suspected or confirmed.

5) If I am suspected to have or confirmed to have Coronavirus will I be able stay with my baby / have skin to skin contact with my baby?

YES. Providing your baby is well and doesn't need support or care from the neonatal team. See section on page 13 for Public Health England's advice regarding precautions to protect your baby from Coronavirus.

6) If the Delivery Suite is full, will I be diverted to another hospital?

NO. In the event that the Delivery Suite is full we have an escalation plan that will allow us to continue with safe care in an appropriate environment within maternity at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Section 5: Information specific to women with suspected or confirmed Coronavirus

Please be assured that even if you have symptoms of Coronavirus during labour we will continue to plan your care in partnership with you.

- If you have mild symptoms of Coronavirus you will be encouraged to remain at home during early labour. The triage line will discuss and plan this in partnership with you.
- The national recommendation is for women with or suspected to have Coronavirus to labour and give birth in hospital.
- Your birthing partner must not have symptoms of Coronavirus.
- When admitted in labour the multi-disciplinary team will be informed. This includes the consultant obstetrician, obstetric registrar, consultant anaesthetist, midwife-in-charge, consultant neonatologist, and neonatal nurse-in-charge.
- During labour your vital signs will be monitored frequently.
- The national recommendation is for your baby to be continuously monitored during labour. This recommendation is based on the information that has been shared in case studies from China. The case studies explain that of the 18 women who laboured while infected with Coronavirus, 8 babies became distressed. Evidence regarding Coronavirus is being gathered all the time and guidance reviewed and updated regularly.
- There is no evidence that you should not have an epidural or spinal analgesia if you have Coronavirus.

If Coronavirus is suspected or confirmed, we advise you to have an epidural sited sooner rather than later because:

- 1) Siting an epidural will take longer due to the way staff need to work in rooms when Coronavirus is suspected or confirmed.
- 2) The advice is to avoid general anaesthetic unless absolutely necessary. This means that if you needed an emergency Caesarean section it may be delayed until a spinal is inserted.

Please note that any emergency birth by Caesarean section in women suspected to have or confirmed to have Coronavirus will encounter delay regardless of anaesthesia. This is because of the additional precautions required in the presence of Coronavirus.

- Unfortunately, we cannot offer the use of the birthing pool to women who have symptoms of Coronavirus. This is due to the increased risk of virus spread via faeces and due to the difficulties and safety issues of working in essential personal protective equipment while in the birthing pool environment.
- If your baby requires resuscitation at birth they will be moved out of the birthing room to a resuscitation area.
- It has recently been discovered that women with Coronavirus are more susceptible to blood clots during the postnatal period. In order to reduce the risk of you developing a blood clot after birth the maternity team will recommend a course of anti-coagulant treatment based on your individual circumstance.
- The Royal Collage of Paediatrics and Child Health advise that families self-isolate for 14 days after the birth of the baby if you have symptoms of Coronavirus.

Section 6: Homebirth

Currently we are able to continue with the homebirth service; if there are any changes to this service we will let you know as soon as we can. You can choose to have a homebirth at any point in your pregnancy, up to 42 weeks.

- When labour starts you must be at least 37 weeks pregnant to remain at home.
- Were unable to support Homebirth for women who are suspected to have or are confirmed to have Coronavirus.

1) Who can be in my home if I choose a homebirth?

- To reduce the spread of the virus, only members of your household can attend labour and birth in your home and they must be symptom free.

2) How many weeks pregnant must I be to have my baby at home?

- When labour starts you must be at least 37 weeks pregnant in order to labour and give birth at home.

Section 7: Induction of labour

1) Will my induction of labour continue as planned?

YES. Providing you are well and not self-isolating. If there are concerns regarding Coronavirus your consultant obstetrician will review your circumstances to determine the most appropriate time to induce your labour.

2) Can my birthing partner stay on the ward during my induction?

YES - birth partners will need to wear a face mask or face covering: From the 12/06/2020 partners can now stay on the ward during induction of labour. Comings and goings need to be kept to a minimum please ensure that birthing partners bring enough food and drink. [Click here to view our visiting charter](#)

3) Can I leave the ward to walk around once my induction of labour has started?

Unfortunately, we cannot allow anyone to walk around the wards. This is a precaution to prevent the spread of the virus

Section 8: Planned Caesarean Section (CS)

1) Will my pre-op appointment still continue?

All women with a planned CS in the coming weeks will be sent in the post an information letter, a prescription to collect from your local pharmacy, and a form to have your pre-op bloods taken. You will need to:

- Isolate yourself with your household for 14 days before your caesarean section
- Attend the drive through Covid-19 testing centre, you receive an appointment date and time via telephone, directly from the testing centre. You will need to be tested 2-3 days in advance
- Read the information sent and watch the [pre-op video](#)
- Have pre-operative bloods taken; the letter will explain when to have the blood test. Pre-op bloods can be arranged as follows:
 - West Berkshire Community Hospital (RG18 3AS), call 01635 273343 – all appointments will be in the afternoon
 - Bracknell Urgent Care Centre, Brantsbridge (RG12 8TR), no appointment required
- Collect your prescription

2) Will my planned Caesarean section continue as planned?

YES. Providing you are well and not having to self-isolate. If you are suspected or confirmed to have Coronavirus your consultant obstetrician will review your circumstances to determine the most appropriate time to schedule your Caesarean section.

3) Can my birthing partner be there during my planned Caesarean section?

YES - Providing you and your partner are well and not self-isolating. Birth partners will need to wear a face mask or face covering

- If suspected or confirmed to have Coronavirus, then you will need to go to theatre without a birthing partner.
- If your birthing partner is suspected or confirmed to have Coronavirus then they cannot be with you in hospital, and you may want to bring your back-up birthing partner.

4) When will my birthing partner need to leave?

When the time comes to transfer you from the theatre recovery to the postnatal ward your birthing partner will need to go home.

5) How long will I need to stay in hospital after my Caesarean section?

This will depend very much on yours and the baby's wellbeing:

- If you and your baby are well you can go home the next day.

- If there is a medical reason to stay in hospital you will be supported to go home as soon as it is safe to do so.

One of the most common delays to going home after a caesarean section is due to the baby's feeding. To get breastfeeding off to a good start we recommend that you express and store colostrum from 36 weeks. [Click here](#) for more information.

Section 9: Postnatal stay on the wards

1) Will my birthing partner or someone be able to stay with me overnight after my baby has been born?

NO. In order to reduce the opportunity for virus transmission/spread birthing partners will need to go home when the time comes for you to be transferred to the postnatal ward. If you and your baby are well, this is normally around 3 hours after birth. The midwifery team will help with transporting all your possessions and will support you during your stay.

2) Can my birthing partner stay with me overnight if we pay for a side room?

NO. In order to reduce the opportunity for virus transmission/spread birthing partners will need to go home when the time comes for you to be transferred to the postnatal ward. The midwifery team includes midwives, doctors, nurses and maternity support workers who will help with transporting all your possessions and will support you during your stay.

3) Can anyone visit me on the ward?

Yes. In order to reduce the spread of the virus we are operating a [restricted visiting policy](#)

4) How long will I stay in hospital after the baby is born?

This will depend on your and your baby's wellbeing:

- If you and your baby are well and there is no medical reason to stay, you will be encouraged and supported to go home directly from the delivery suite (usually within 3-6 hours of birth).
- If there is a medical reason to stay in hospital you will be supported to go home as soon as it is safe to do so.

To help give feeding a head start we recommend that you express and store colostrum from 36 weeks. [Click here](#) for more information.

5) *Will anyone be able to come onto the ward to pick me up when it is time to go home?*

NO. You will need to meet whoever is taking you home outside the ward door. The maternity team will help take your possessions and your baby to the door. If your partner needs to bring your other children the maternity team will help you to the parking ramp outside maternity reception on level 2.

Section 10: Postnatal care at home

1) *Will community midwives still provide postnatal care?*

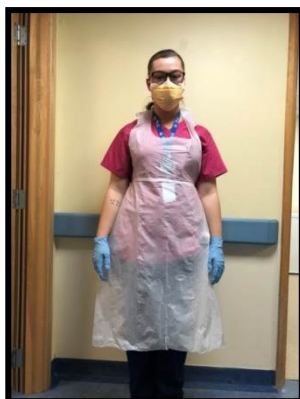
YES. The community midwives will plan your postnatal care with you taking into consideration your individual needs. If there is a concern regarding Coronavirus in your home the midwives will plan with you the best way to provide your care. The schedule below is a guide to what your postnatal care package may look like:

- A midwife home visit the day after you return home.
- On day 3 you will receive a phone call/ video call to find out how you and the baby are. This phone call will help you and the community team decide if you need to see a health care professional.
- On day 5 the baby will be weighed and with your consent the baby blood spot test taken.
- On day 7 you will receive a phone call/video call to find out how you and the baby are. This phone call/video call will help you and the community team decide if you need to see a health care professional.
- The midwife will plan with you when to discharge you to the care of the health visiting team.

What are staff wearing?

- You will see staff walking around wearing a mask.
- When you have contact with a member of staff they will most likely be dressed as picture A shows.
- If during labour you have symptoms of Coronavirus, staff may dress as shown in picture A or B. What the staff wear will depend on the care you require and the stage of labour.

A



B



Section 11: Your baby

1) *What precautions should I take to try and protect my baby from Coronavirus?*

The current recommendations from Public Health England are:

- Adhere to the government's recommendations to stay at home and not visit with friends or family.
- Wash your hands before touching baby, breast pump or bottles.
- Try to avoid coughing or sneezing on your baby.
- Clean any breast pump used as recommended by the manufacturer after every use.
- Sterilise equipment and bottles carefully before each use.
- Do not share bottles or breast pumps with someone else.

[Click here](#) to see the national leaflet Coronavirus: Parent information for Newborn Babies.

[Click here](#) to see the national leaflet for parents about Illness in Newborn Babies.

When the time comes to lift the current social distancing restrictions the current thinking is that large gatherings to celebrate the baby's arrival should be avoided until more is known about the spread of the virus.

2) *Will I be able to breastfeed my baby if I have suspected or confirmed Coronavirus?*

YES. There is no evidence showing that the virus can be carried in breast milk, and the well-recognised benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any potential risks of transmission of Coronavirus through breast milk or by being in close contact with your baby. Follow the guidance on reducing the risk of your baby developing Coronavirus above.

3) *What if I am worried about coping with a crying baby without my family to help?*

Having a baby for most people is an amazing and joyful experience; however, we also know it can be stressful. Feelings of anxiety or stress may be increased due to the impact that Coronavirus is having on you and your family. The links below will take you to some information about coping with a crying baby. Please consider the information alongside the government's recommendations about social distancing and staying at home:

[Coping with a crying baby](#)

[NSPCC Handle with Care](#)

4) *If I have suspected or confirmed Coronavirus can my baby still have the BCG vaccine?*

YES. Providing your baby is well we will try to give your baby the BCG vaccine before you leave hospital. If we can't give the vaccine to your baby before you leave hospital you will be sent an appointment.

- The BCG vaccine is only given to babies that meet certain Public Health criteria, and it is very important during this pandemic that babies who meet the vaccination criteria are vaccinated.

5) *Can we still register the birth of our baby?*

Yes. Your community midwife will have up to date information regarding this service.

- Currently you can claim child benefit or universal credit without registering the birth.
- GP practices can still register children without a birth certificate.

Section 12: Looking after your mental health

A general increase in anxiety is to be expected in the current pandemic situation. Often, simply acknowledging these difficulties can help to reduce some anxiety. Therefore, it is really important to talk to your midwife or GP if you are concerned about your levels of anxiety or mental health.

- A useful link to self-help for anxiety and stress can be [found here](#).
- You can also self-refer to Talking Therapies which is a friendly and approachable NHS service that offers support if you're coping with challenges like depression, stress, anxiety or phobias. [Click here](#) for more information about his service or call 0300 365 0200.
- If you are concerned about your mental health you can also call the Common Point of Entry to speak with a mental health practitioner who will direct you to the right service, call 0300 036 0300.

Additional useful resources

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have produced a very useful FAQ information page for pregnant women which you can access [here](#).

The Royal College of Midwives have set up a useful website for [pregnant women](#).

Infant feeding information links:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtO0KvF_d30&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=7
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCg5DPxdfDo&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=1
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgaRkQsV2H4&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=3&t=0s

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvCe4PycUbo&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=3
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEx8Msw229s&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=4
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCxENZXe9IA&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=5
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4KQULz9u5Q&list=PLBay_LKYZ_gHNG5dYu1I7zZ_3QhcTNmt1&index=6

Produced by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Maternity Unit in partnership with Reading Maternity Voices – updated 27 June 2020.