

Information and advice for Birth Partners

We recognise that during the current Covid-19 outbreak, you and your partner may be feeling anxious and confused about many aspects of pregnancy and birth and sad about the loss of things you may have planned for pregnancy, birth and afterwards. We hope that you will find the information below helpful in thinking about how you can best help your partner and look after your own wellbeing through this difficult time.

At St George's we are working hard to keep our women and our staff safe during the current Covid-19 outbreak and are reviewing the most up to date evidence to inform the decisions we make regarding all aspects of maternity care.

Antenatal Care

Unfortunately you will not be able to attend antenatal appointments, including scans, with your partner during this time. We know that this may bring some sadness at not being able to share these special moments, but please be assured that your partner will be well cared for by our staff.

If your partner has to be admitted to the antenatal ward for monitoring, you will not be able to visit but you can keep in touch by phone or video calls. You can support her by ensuring that she has a bag packed and ready at home with things she might need if she was asked to come into hospital.

Labour and birth

You will be able to stay in hospital with your partner when she is in active labour or giving birth as long as you are not showing any symptoms of Covid-19 (new, persistent cough and temperature over 37.8 degrees) and have not had any symptoms in the past 7 days.

We recommend that, where possible, you self-isolate for 14 days prior to your partner's due date to give yourself the best chance of being with her for the birth. You and your partner should discuss another option for a different birth partner in case you become unwell and are not able to attend. If your partner tests positive for Covid-19 on admission and you share a house, you will also be asked to go home as you will be assumed to have Covid-19. In these circumstances an alternative birth partner who lives in a different house can come and take your place.

While you are in the hospital you will be asked to follow strict infection control procedures including:

- Washing your hands regularly with soap and water and using hand sanitiser gel in clinical areas as available

- If you cough or sneeze, covering your mouth with a tissue and disposing of this in a bin immediately,
- Staying in the labour room with your partner and not moving around the Labour Ward unaccompanied. Please use the call bell if you require assistance.
- Wearing a mask or any personal protective equipment (PPE) during the labour or birth if asked to do so and following instructions from staff regarding disposal of this.

Going into labour

If your partner goes into labour naturally, you should telephone the delivery suite on **020 8725 4654** and talk to a midwife. If you are advised to come to the hospital, you should bring everything that you and your partner will need for the labour, birth and afterwards. This includes any snacks or changes of clothes you will need as you will not be able to leave the labour ward once your partner is admitted.

You will be able to stay with your partner throughout her labour and birth. This includes the situation of your partner transferring to theatre, unless there are specific safety concerns which staff will explain to you. If you cannot attend theatre, you will be taken to see your partner and the baby as soon as possible.

Induction of labour

If your partner has an induction of labour, you will not be able to stay with her on the antenatal ward. However, once she is transferred to the delivery suite in active labour you will be called and can join her there. Please make sure you keep your phone near to you so that you can accept the call from the hospital (this may show up as a 'withheld' or 'unknown' number).

Elective (planned) Caesarean Birth

If your partner is having a planned caesarean, you will be able to be with her in theatre. You will be given the appropriate clothing / protective equipment and advised of how to wear it. The staff in theatre will be wearing Personal Protective Equipment and may not be able to communicate with you easily. You should remain in the area of the theatre where the midwife advises you can stand.

If your partner requires a general anaesthetic you will not be able to be with her in theatre but will be taken to see her and the baby soon afterwards.

After the birth

You will be asked to leave the hospital once your partner is transferred to the postnatal ward. We know that this will be very hard and you may feel upset about having to leave your partner and the new baby. Your partner will be well cared for by our staff and you can keep in touch by phone or video calls (through Trust free WiFi). She will be discharged as soon as it is safe for her and the baby.

If your baby has to be admitted to the Neonatal Unit you will be allowed to visit him or her on the unit. The staff there will give you more information about the precautions you need to take when visiting your baby.

Once at home, you can support your partner by continuing to care for her and allow her time to rest and recover from the birth. If your partner has had a caesarean birth, she should mobilise and

remain active but take things slowly. She should not lift anything heavier than the baby. You can help by preparing healthy meals and caring for other children.

If your partner is breastfeeding the baby, make sure that she is comfortable and that she has access to drinks. She may want you to cuddle the baby while she sleeps. If she is bottle feeding the baby, you can help by ensuring that all of the equipment is fully sterilised. We encourage responsive feeding by breast or bottle, which means feeding the baby as required and not to a set schedule.

The midwives will keep in contact with your wife by phone, with an appointment in person between 4 and 8 days after birth. After 10 days, care will usually transfer to your partner's GP and health visitors.

In line with national guidance, you should not have any visitors in your home to prevent spread of infection. We realise that this is a time when you would normally want to share your new arrival with family and friends in person. We encourage you to keep in contact through phone calls, photos and video calls as social support is important for both you and your baby.

Support

It is normal for you and your partner to feel a range of emotions in the days and weeks after birth – especially at the current time when so much is different and we are asked to stay apart from family and friends we may usually rely on. If you or your partner need any support, please do not hesitate in asking for it. It is OK to not be OK.

Resources

St George's Website: <https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/service/maternity-services/>

Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Q&A: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy>

MIND: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/postnatal-depression-and-perinatal-mental-health/partners/>

NHS guide for Partners: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/dad-to-be-pregnant-partner/>