

COVID-19 Alert levels 3 and 4
Information for midwives: 22 April 2020

Midwives, personal safety, and the safety of women and their children

Women's Refuge CrisisLine: 0800 REFUGE or 0800 733 843

Women abused by partners are more at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic

Social distancing and self-isolation may mean that women living with an abusive partner are more at risk of an escalation of family violence. It is too early to assess the impact of COVID-19 on family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand but evidence from China indicates a rise in women seeking refuge support.¹ Women's Refuge is working with the Coalition Government to ensure women can access help. The crisis line will continue operating and if midwives are concerned about someone they think might be at risk of violence, they can call 0800 REFUGE, which will be available 24/7.

Midwives taking care of their own health and safety is important

As midwives are continuing to visit their clients in homes, it is important to be aware of the risks, and to revisit the principles of staying safe. If midwives feel unsafe then women and their babies may also be unsafe. Midwifery partnerships with women and families/whānau are generally positive experiences, but it is strategic to identify potentially unsafe situations to avoid or minimise any risk, particularly at times when the necessary pandemic response of home isolation may cause violence to escalate.

TERMINATE A NEGATIVE INTERACTION IF THERE ARE ANY FEARS FOR YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY

- Withdraw from the situation.
- Move to a safe place that has an immediate exit.
- Keep the aggressor in view and do not turn away.

De-escalation: practical tips

- Remain calm, listen carefully, talk and move slowly.
- Maintain a relaxed persona and do not raise your voice.
- Do not touch the potential aggressor.
- Do not tell the person to relax or calm down as this may escalate rather than de-escalate the situation.
- If you are concerned about the immediate safety of the woman, child/ren or yourself phone the police.
- Document concerns, actions and outcomes later in the most appropriate place, which may need to be a separate record than the woman-held maternity notes.

- You can contact the College National Office to speak with a Midwifery Advisor about your concerns. The office is closed during the lock down but phone calls are being diverted to the advisors.

Plan and be prepared for a fast exit

- Have your mobile phone charged at all times.
- Be prepared – dial 111 for an emergency.
- Do not enter a situation if feeling unsafe.
- Alert practice partners to concerns and always tell them (or an appropriate person) of the time and location of your visit.
- Be aware of the exits from the home and park the car in a place that enables ease of departure.

Contact numbers for Women's Refuge

CrisisLine: 0800 REFUGE or 0800 733 843

Phone toll-free from anywhere in New Zealand for information, advice and support about domestic violence as well as help in a crisis. Help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Follow the simple steps to be put through to a local refuge on touchtone or mobile phone. There will be an automatic redirection to a female advocate in the appropriate region.

- **National website**

<https://womensrefuge.org.nz/>

- **Find your local refuge**

<https://womensrefuge.org.nz/contact-us/find-your-local-refuge/>

¹ Women's Refuge. (2020). *Women abused by partners are more at risk during Covid-19 outbreak*. Media release 18/3/2020. <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/covid-19-outbreak/>