

COVID-19 Information for hapū wāhine, pregnant women, people and whānau: Updated 14 March 2022

Frequently asked questions about home birth during the COVID-19 pandemic

Why home birth?

Home birth is chosen by many women and people every year in Aotearoa New Zealand. Home birth is a safe and positive choice for healthy women and babies. Birthing at home offers the best environment for an unmedicated birth with significantly fewer interventions than for women and people who give birth in hospital.

During the COVID-19 pandemic more whānau are considering the option of birthing their baby at home, and each has their own personal reasons. To gather more information on home birth, including physical, psychological, emotional and social benefits, go to the Homebirth Aotearoa website <https://homebirth.org.nz/>

Can I have a homebirth?

Home birth is a safe and positive choice for you if you and your baby are well and do not have any factors affecting you or your baby's health which may require medical assistance. Talk to your midwife to see if home birth could be an option for you.

If you have health or pregnancy factors which may indicate that obstetric care is required during your labour and birth, or if you are unwell with COVID-19, it is recommended that you labour and birth at hospital. If you are COVID-19 positive but asymptomatic or only have very mild symptoms, talk to your midwife about whether home birth is an option.

Who will be at my homebirth?

You can choose which support people you have with you at your home birth.

At your homebirth your midwife will have another midwife there to support you and her during the later stages of labour and after the birth. Your midwife will stay with you for at least 2 hours after the birth and whenua|placental birth.

What happens when I go into labour?

Your midwife will discuss the signs of labour and how to respond to these with you during your antenatal appointments, and will provide you with information on when to call your midwife in labour.

Your midwife will ask you and all people living in your home some questions to determine whether there are any risk factors for COVID-19 infection. This is so that your midwives can wear the most appropriate face mask and other PPE during your labour and birth care.

What types of pain relief can I use at home?

There are many things you can do at home to assist you to work through labour to the birth of your baby, including:

- meditation, breathing and relaxation techniques

- heat packs
- massage and acupressure
- water (warm shower or bath/ birth pool)
- using a variety of upright positions/walking
- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)
- hypnobirthing
- during the Covid-19 pandemic, online courses that support you to learn active birthing skills may be available if in-person classes are limited – search online or contact the local pregnancy and parenting education providers in your area.

What will my midwife bring to my home birth?

Your midwife will bring all the essential equipment and medications that may be needed to provide safe care during your labour and birth. In the majority of cases, interventions are not required, but home birth midwives are prepared with the skills and equipment they need to manage urgent situations and to arrange transfer to hospital if this becomes necessary.

Midwives' home birth kits include equipment to monitor you and your baby during labour (blood pressure and temperature, listening to your baby's heart rate); sterilised instruments like scissors for the baby's cord; cord clamps, ties or muka; local anaesthetic and suturing equipment in case you need any stitches after giving birth. Your midwife will come equipped with oxygen and will always carry resuscitation equipment and certain medications. These things are required to be available at every birth no matter where the baby is born.

What extra preparation and supplies do I need to plan for my home birth?

Your midwife will ask you to gather some items in preparation for your home birth. Here is a list of common items to prepare:

Suggested items for women and whānau to gather for a planned home birth

Old towels x 6-8 Hand towels (for applying moist heat) Flannels Lamp/s for low lighting Birth mat (see instructions below)/plastic sheet Sanitary pads Container for placenta One large and two small plastic bags for rubbish	Soft towels for newborn x 3-4 Hot water bottles (wrap towels to warm) Radiant heater/good heating source Baby nappies Baby clothes and woollen hats Safe sleep space and newborn bedding Car seat
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It is a good idea to make a waterproof birth mat which protects their furniture and can be a fun project for whānau to join in with in preparation for the arrival of your new baby.

How to make a birth mat

Lay down a large plastic (waterproof) sheet or small tarpaulin
 Place newspaper or old blankets/duvet inner on top
 Place one clean old sheet or soft blanket on top
 Seal all four edges with strong duct tape

Think about where in your home there is an appropriately quiet, private space to labour and birth where there is enough room for the midwife to move around you. You will need to be able to heat this space if the air temperature is less than 21°C to ensure your baby is kept comfortably warm. A form of reliable heating is essential.

What happens with the whenua | placenta?

Most whānau | families who have a home birth will keep their whenua | placenta to bury. Many whānau make ipu whenua or use commercially available placenta kits that biodegrade once buried. If you do not wish to keep your baby's whenua | placenta, your midwife will take it to the district health board for appropriate disposal with other human tissue. It is important that the whenua | placenta is not discarded with general rubbish/landfill.

Do my midwives need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE)?

Midwives have been advised by the Ministry of Health to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) for labour and birth care in all settings, including home birth. Your midwives will wear gloves and a mask, and may wear eye protection (goggles or a face shield) and a gown at the time of your baby's birth. Your midwife will wash her hands frequently. These measures promote everyone's safety and wellbeing.

Can I have a water birth at home?

Talk to your midwife about water birth. You can buy or hire a birthing pool and disposable liner and your midwife will provide information on where to access this in your area. Many regional home birth groups have pools for hire – search on the internet (facebook/Google) for your local group.

If you have hired the pool, you will need to ensure it is well cleaned according to the instructions before you return it.

In some cases, giving birth in the water will not be recommended, but you may choose to labour in the water. Your midwife will guide you.

Who will care for my other children when I am in labour?

If you have older children, you will need to organise someone to be responsible for them during your labour and birth. Some whānau choose to have children there for the birth while others have a friend or family member providing childcare away from the home.

What about care after the birth?

Your midwife will stay with you for at least 2 hours after the birth of your baby and whenua | placenta. Your midwife will visit you at home for 4- 6 weeks after your baby's birth. Midwives provide breastfeeding support and are on call for any concerns you may have.