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## Birth partners

Having a trusted birth partner present throughout labour [is known to make a significant difference](#) to the safety and well-being of women in childbirth. At times like this, when coronavirus is heightening anxiety, that reassurance is more important than ever. While we concur with decisions to restrict access to birth partners who have or are suspecting of having coronavirus in order to safeguard the health of the woman and the maternity staff supporting her, NHS Trusts and Boards should continue to follow guidance allowing birth partners access to the labour and birth rooms.

Localised restrictions by Trusts and Boards on visitors may mean that partners are not able to attend routine antenatal appointments or stay with women on antenatal or postnatal wards. **It is important to note that this should not apply to a partner being in the labour and birth room. There are efforts to reintroduce visitors, partners and other supporters of pregnant women in maternity services while ensuring a safe environment for all service users.** The newly published [NHS England framework \(September 2020\)](#) provides guidance for the reintroduction of visiting in both inpatient and outpatient setting.

### Induction of labour:

A birth partner without symptoms should be able to attend when a woman is having her labour induced entirely in a single room (e.g. on the Labour Ward) but not if the induction takes place in a bay on a main ward, as it would not be possible to achieve the necessary social distancing measures.

It may be of benefit to consider current policies in relation to indications for induction of labour and community based induction where possible, to avoid unnecessary admissions and ensure women have as much support during the early part of the induction process as possible.

The newly established RCM Professorial Advisory group, made up of some of the leading midwifery professors across the UK has undertaken a rapid analytic scoping review to support decision making about induction of labour approaches during the pandemic, that can be accessed [here](#)

At the point that a woman is going into active labour and she is able to be moved to her own room on the labour ward, her birth partner should be advised that they can now join her.

### Caesarean and assisted birth:

We fully support women having their birth partners with them during labour and the birth, unless the birth partner has symptoms of Covid-19 or has tested positive, when an alternative well birth partner can attend. Around one in four women in the UK has a caesarean birth. A caesarean may be recommended as a planned (elective) procedure, for medical reasons, or as an emergency. Furthermore, around one in five women in the UK has an assisted birth (ventouse or forceps). Some of these types of birth may also be recommended to occur in an operating theatre in order to allow the maternity team to modify plans and undertake a caesarean birth if necessary.

Most caesareans and instrumental births in theatre are carried out under spinal or epidural anaesthetic. In this situation, everything should be done by the clinical staff to enable the birth partner to stay with the woman in theatre.



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If a woman requires a general anaesthetic, the birth partner will not be able to be present for the birth.

The RCM, RCOG and RCOA have developed the following guidance for birth partners below which you might find helpful to adapt for local use to hand to partners when they attend the labour ward:

- We are asking you to follow the guidance below to keep yourself, your family, other families and our staff as safe as possible during the pandemic.
- During the coronavirus pandemic, all hospitals are restricting visitors but there are exceptions for a birthing partner during active labour and birth.
- Every woman should be able to have one birth partner stay with her through labour and birth, unless the birth occurs under a general anaesthetic.
- To help prevent spread of coronavirus to other women, their babies, and to key front-line healthcare staff, it is very important that you do not attend the maternity unit if you have any symptoms of coronavirus or have had any in the previous 7 days
- If you are unwell, protect your family and our NHS staff and stay at home. To prepare for this, women and their current birth partner are being encouraged to think about an alternative birth partner, if required
- If you are supporting a woman during labour and birth, please be aware of the strict infection control procedures in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus to other pregnant women and their babies, as well as other people within the hospital and the maternity staff.
- Please wash your hands regularly with soap and water and use hand sanitiser gel in clinical areas as available
- If you cough or sneeze, please cover your mouth with a tissue and dispose of this in a bin immediately,
- Stay in the labour room with the woman you are supporting. Do not move (/walk) around the Labour Ward unaccompanied – use the call bell if you require assistance.
- If you are asked to wear a mask or any personal protective equipment (PPE) during the labour or birth, it is very important. Please follow the instructions carefully, and to take it off before you leave the clinical area.
- If you are accompanying a woman to her caesarean birth, please be aware that operating theatre staff will be wearing PPE and it may be more difficult for them to communicate with you:
  - A staff member will be allocated to support you; please carefully follow their instructions and approach them if you have any questions.
  - To enable the clinical staff to do their job, it is very important that you do not move around the operating theatre as you risk de-sterilising sterile areas and spreading the virus.
  - The maternity team will do everything they can to enable you to be present for the birth. However, if



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there is a particular safety concern, they may ask that you are not present in the operating theatre. If this is the case, the team should discuss this with you and explain their reasons unless it is an emergency.

- We understand this is a stressful and anxious time for pregnant women and their families and we thank you for your cooperation during this time
- Please be assured that the maternity team will do all it can to provide information, guidance and support to you and the woman giving birth.

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