



Guidance for midwives, student midwives and maternity support workers providing community-based care during the Covid-19 pandemic

Introduction

During the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, maternity services are adapting the way in which they provide care.

This may include:

- Reduction of number of routine antenatal and postnatal appointments (RCM, 2020a)
- Offering some antenatal and postnatal appointments through a virtual or online platform to reduce the need for face to face contacts (RCM, 2020a)
- Pausing some services such as group antenatal classes or homebirth, based on assessment of staffing and service pressures (NHSE, 2020; RCM, 2020b)

Some face to face home visits will continue throughout the pandemic to ensure safe care for women and babies. These visits may include antenatal or postnatal visits and labour and birth care.

It is vital that the safety of maternity staff asked to provide home visits is protected by their employer. This will include:

- **Individualised risk assessment** for maternity staff to identify if they are vulnerable due to any underlying health conditions or pregnancy and therefore home visiting may not be appropriate.
- **Provision of training for all staff** in infection control procedures to prevent the spread of the virus. This will include the safe donning and doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); hand washing technique and guidance on how to maintain social distance as far as possible when providing care.
- **Provision of appropriate equipment** and resources to adhere fully to all national Infection prevention and control (IPC) guidance. This will include provision of adequate supplies of appropriate PPE: masks, disposable aprons and gloves, gowns (for homebirth), hats and eye protection. This will also include wipes in order to clean surfaces and equipment after each visit; hand sanitiser; tissues; waste bags.
- **Diary planning** should take into account the need for staff to be able to access toilet facilities and places to have safe breaks during the day of community working, given the additional difficulties presented by wearing PPE.

Preparing for a home visit

1. Before attending a home visit, the practitioner should identify whether a face to face visit is absolutely necessary or whether a virtual appointment may be a safe alternative and is clinically appropriate.
2. Seek to assess the potential risk in the home that is to be visited. Is the home crowded? Is there anyone in the home with symptoms?

This will generally best be done by contacting the woman prior to the appointment to discuss their current circumstances.

3. If any such risks are identified, consider how the risk might be mitigated.
 - Request that, if the accommodation allows, the woman is alone in the room during the appointment (along with her baby, if a postnatal appointment), advising her that other members of the household should not be in the same room as the visiting midwife; if the space in the home is very limited, this might mean that members of the household will be asked to go out for a short period for exercise during the visit.
 - If the woman or a member of the household has symptoms, consider whether the appointment can be delayed until after the seven or fourteen day isolation period.
 - If the appointment cannot be delayed, advise the woman to be alone for the appointment and ensure that the room where the appointment is taking place is large enough to allow the midwife to remain maintain social distancing when possible and that the room is well ventilated (with an open window).
 - Advise the woman that you will be attending the appointment wearing protective clothing, including a mask; advise the woman that you will need to touch as few surfaces as possible during your visit, so you will ask them to open doors for you. If the visit is postnatal, you might ask that the woman undresses the baby before or at your arrival, while ensuring they are kept warm with a blanket, to enable you to undertake an examination of the baby.

Visiting a home

1. Put on appropriate PPE for the care that will be provided during the visit
2. Use hand sanitiser before entering the home
3. Ask to see woman (and her baby if postnatal) in a room without any other members of the household.
4. Minimise the surfaces that you touch during the visit – avoid putting your personal items down on surfaces in the home, or, if you need to put things down, use a plastic bag to place them on and then ask the woman to dispose of the bag.
5. Ask for the room to be well ventilated (while ensuring that the baby is kept warm)
6. As far as possible, maintain social distancing throughout the visit, unless you are needing to provide hands on care
7. Keep the length of the appointment to as brief as possible. If a longer conversation is needed following any physical examination or care, consider whether this could be provided virtually or by telephone following the visit.

Homebirth care

If you are looking after someone during labour and birth, you are likely to be needed to be in the woman's home for a more extended period.

Preparation before a homebirth

When planning for the homebirth prior to the woman going into labour, ensure that she and her partner are aware of how they can protect themselves and the midwives caring for them during labour and birth:

- Ask the woman to report any symptoms of Covid-19 in the home to the midwife before she or he attends in early labour

Keeping midwives safe

Before the midwife arrives, ensure that there is a bathroom that she or he can use during her visit. Ensure that frequently used surfaces in the bathroom are clean – light switch, taps and toilet flush. Provide the midwife with a clean towel to dry his/her hands.

- Wipe frequently touched surfaces in the room where the woman is planning to give birth using either a washing up liquid or usual cleaning fluid. Plan for the woman to labour and birth in a larger room – this will allow the midwife to maintain an appropriate social distance while also being able to provide care.
 - The number of people in the room where the midwife is providing care should at all time be limited to one birth partner.
 - The labour room should have the facility to have a window opened if at all possible to enable adequate ventilation.

During a labour and birth at home

- On arrival, screen the woman for any symptoms in the household of Covid-19. If there are symptoms of Covid-19 present, advise the woman that it is recommended that she gives birth in hospital.
- Ensure that you and any other members of the team have appropriate PPE, in line with current UK guidance.
- Avoid touching any surfaces unnecessarily, keep your personal items off surfaces in the home.
- Avoid touching your face or eyes; wash your hands frequently.
- Ensure you are able to take a break and have fluids and food.
- Practice social distancing as far as possible throughout the labour and birth – coaching the woman and her partner from 2m+ and only moving into close proximity when necessary.
- Ensure that the room is well ventilated.
- Ensure that you have a way of being able to write contemporaneous notes safely while wearing PPE – this is likely to be through having another member of staff present to scribe.

After the home visit

Clean with wipes any equipment you have used in the home, including your bag and mobile telephone/laptop

Remove PPE and put in a clinical waste bag that is tied shut

Clean your hands with hand sanitiser

References

Guidance for the public about what to do if they share a home with someone with signs of Covid-19
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876719/Coronavirus_what_to_do_if_you_or_someone_you_share_home_with_signs_coronavirus_20200328.pdf

Government guidance about PPE in community settings:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file

[/878750/T2_poster_Recommended_PPE_for_primary_outpatient_community_and_social_care_by_setting.pdf](#)

Some information for the public about approaches to cleaning the home during Covid-19:

<https://www.which.co.uk/news/2020/03/coronavirus-how-to-clean-your-home-effectively/>

RCM, 2020a, RCM/RCOG guidance on antenatal and postnatal adaptations during the pandemic:

<https://www.rcm.org.uk/media/3837/guidance-for-antenatal-and-postnatal-services-in-the-evolving-coronavirus-pandemic-rcm-and-rcog.pdf>

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RCM, 2020b, RCM/RCOG guidance on provision of midwife led settings during the pandemic

<https://www.rcm.org.uk/media/3893/2020-04-17-guidance-for-provision-of-midwife-led-settings.pdf>

NHS England, 2020, Clinical guide for the temporary reorganisation of intrapartum maternity care during the coronavirus pandemic. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/04/C0241-specialty-guide-intrapartum-maternity-care-9-april-2020.pdf>