



Car sharing: RCM guidance

Introduction

Community placements are essential for ensuring that student midwives have learning opportunities that enable them to:

- Experience the role and scope of the midwife enabling them to provide holistic care to women, newborn infants, partners and families.
- Understand the lived experience of women, to provide care tailored to their needs.
- Achieve the proficiencies related to continuity of care for all women and newborn infants.
- Provide information about and promote access to community based services.
- Experience midwifery care for a diverse population across a range of settings, including midwifery led services¹.

The requirement to adhere to social distancing and hygiene measures because of COVID-19 presents challenges when it comes to ensuring the safe deployment of student midwives within community settings. The means by which students travel to their placements and accompany midwives to home visits and other community destinations is one such challenge and the subject of this guidance.

What is the problem?

Because many students do not own a car, and also as it can be impractical to cover community visits by public transport, it has been common practice for community midwives to share their cars with student midwives when undertaking community visits. However, the impact of COVID-19 has been far reaching for the delivery of community services and has required strict adherence to recommended guidance around the wearing of PPE, safe distancing and travel restrictions, including car sharing.

Moreover, midwives and students have voiced concerns about the safety of sharing cars. Many midwives use their family cars for work, and in some cases the only time they are able to remove their masks are when they are within their cars (and some midwives have been deployed to the community because of a need to wear a mask at all times e.g. if they have asthma). There is also the additional time required to clean the car before and after they have shared it with students and other guests. While guidance recommends driving with the car windows open, the onset of winter will make this harder to adhere to.

What guidance says

Current government travel guidance² discourages sharing a vehicle with anyone outside of a household or support bubble. Where car sharing is unavoidable, the guidance recommends:

- Sharing with the same people each time.

¹ NMC (2019) Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#private-cars-and-other-vehicles>

V1 completed: October 2020
Review date: January 2021

- Keeping to small groups.
- Opening windows for ventilation.
- Travelling side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow.
- Facing away from each other.
- Considering seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle.
- Cleaning the car between journeys using standard cleaning products, paying particular attention to door handles and other areas that people may touch
- Asking the driver and passengers to wear face coverings.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also provides advice on the use of cars³. This is consistent with the Government's travel guidance but includes some additional suggestions for when social distancing is not possible, such as using physical screening where this does not compromise safety (for example by reducing visibility) and using a fixed pairing system.

Advice on car sharing in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is not substantively different to that of the Government and HSE. The Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland has produced this helpful infographic on car sharing - <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/advice-car-sharing-english-and-translations>

Universities may have issued their own guidance about use of cars for placements, as part of their general advice on COVID-19, so do check your university's website and other communication channels for the latest information.

RCM advice

The RCM strongly advises that car sharing for community placements should only be considered if it is not possible to make alternative arrangements. We recommend considering other options, including:

- Basing the community placement around a health centre or clinic, which may enable students to walk (or cycle) to visits. Furthermore, if a student is unable to attend visits in the home, she/he can gain some community experience by attending antenatal and postnatal clinics in community settings.
- Use of public transport, where there is an adequate local transport system that enables students to cover the placement area. Students should be able to claim travel expenses for use of public transport.
- Students using their own cars, subject to them having a full driver's licence, access to a car and appropriate insurance. Students should be able to claim payments towards the mileage costs and if they have had to upgrade their insurance policy.
- Use of a hire car if there are no alternative cost effective means of transport available. Agreement should first be sought from the university to meet the cost of providing a hire car.

Where a student is travelling independently from her/his midwife, then it will be especially important to ensure that they have each other's phone numbers and that they both regularly check in on each other.

³ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/social-distancing/using-vehicles.htm>

V1 completed: October 2020
Review date: January 2021

Another factor to consider is the high level of anxiety among some women and families about home visits. It is good practice for midwives to phone the woman ahead of a visit, inform her that a student midwife will be in attendance and seek to answer any questions that the woman may have. Emphasising that the student is part of the maternity team may provide some reassurance in this respect.

If none of these or other options are viable, then car sharing can be considered but this must be:

- In accordance with the latest government and HSE advice.
- In consultation with community midwives and RCM health and safety representatives.
- After a risk assessment has been undertaken.