Is it safe to plan a home birth for your first baby?

Yes, it is safe to plan a home birth for your first baby as long as you listen to the advice from your midwife, your GP and your hospital consultant obstetrician.

Data shows that first time mothers are four times more likely to transfer to hospital during labour (NPEC 2013). The reasons for transfer are to ensure a safe delivery for you and your baby.

You should be aware that the risk to your baby’s well being doubles if you are a first time mother, giving birth at home. The key points from this study are available at: www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/downloads/files/birthplace/Birthplace-key-findings.pdf

Risk factors to be considered when approving a home birth

The following risks, if present, may mean that you would not be considered suitable for a home birth:
- Previous or existing medical, surgical, mental health conditions
- Previous pregnancy and birth history that are outlined in the application form/consent form
- Risks that may develop during your pregnancy
- Environmental risks such as distance from hospital, from midwife and adequacy of support at home.

The application form/consent form has six tables that provide more details. Your midwife will discuss these with you. It is important to ask your midwife any questions you have.

You can also look for further information from the following web sites.

Useful web sites

- Association for Improvements in Maternity Services – Ireland
  www.aimsireland.ie
- Community Midwives Association
  www.communitymidwives.ie
- Home Birth Association of Ireland
  www.homebirth.ie
- Health Service Executive
  www.hse.ie
- National Perinatal Epidemiology Centre
  www.ucc.ie/en/npec/
- Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
  www.nursingboard.ie
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
  www.rcog.org.uk
- Royal College of Physicians of Ireland
  www.rcpi.ie
- The Child and Family Agency
  www.tusla.ie
- The Department of Children and Youth Affairs
  www.dcya.gov.ie

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How many women have a home birth in Ireland?

In 2013, 250 women planned a home birth with the HSE Home Birth Service. This represents less than 1 percent of all births in the country. Factors that may influence a woman in choosing a home birth include:

- Availability of a midwife
- Support and comfort in the home
- Timely availability of emergency services
- Distance from a maternity hospital

Who will support me during labour and birth?

Professional support will be provided by your midwife. You may also choose to have your partner or whoever you decide to have with you in labour.

A second midwife, also funded by the HSE, will be present at the birth, to support the midwife during your labour and birth of your baby. Your midwife may arrange to introduce you to the second midwife during your pregnancy.

When might home birth not be a safe option?

Pregnancy and childbirth is a process where risks and safety may change at any stage. Midwives are trained to recognise signs of complications during pregnancy and labour. If complications arise during your pregnancy, labour or following the birth of your child, your midwife may advise you to transfer to hospital care. To view the most recent statistics on planned home birth in Ireland, visit: www.ucc.ie/en/npec/publications/