

January 2021

Dear parents-to-be

I am writing to you to explain the arrangements and support available to you during your pregnancy in view of the COVID-19 global pandemic. We fully appreciate that for new parents-to-be and especially first time parents, the pandemic has caused a huge amount of worry and anxiety and has left some people feeling lost, lonely and unsure what to do. Bringing new life into the world during a global pandemic and trying to keep everyone safe from COVID-19 has been a difficult and challenging time for everyone involved and we are all in this together.

Hopefully the information provided below will help you to understand how our service is operating during the pandemic and how you can access further support and information when you need it.

### **Maternity services during the pandemic**

Access to many NHS and other local services such as GP's, Pharmacies and Children's Centres have been significantly reduced during the pandemic to reduce the spread of coronavirus. However care of pregnant and birthing women cannot be deferred or put on hold, and therefore we have continued to provide a full range of antenatal, labour and post-natal services to women throughout the pandemic. It has been our utmost priority during this time to continue to provide safe care – not just in terms of reducing the spread of COVID-19 but to ensure the highest standards of safe maternity care are maintained.

We have faced many new challenges during these unprecedented times, such as implementing new infection control guidance; the re-location of some of our services; reduced staffing numbers due to shielding, self-isolating or sickness; conducting phone or virtual appointments; restrictions around visitors and partners attending. All of these issues remain subject to change as the national and local guidance and infection rates change frequently and we continue to review our local risk assessments.

Visiting restrictions have meant that pregnant women have had to attend for antenatal care on their own and partners have not been able to accompany as much as they would wish to. We understand that this is not ideal, neither for pregnant women nor for our midwives. We truly value the support that partners bring to women during their pregnancy journey and throughout labour and birth. As midwives we understand that where a woman has a supportive partner throughout, her experience and the outcomes for baby are always better. However we have had to balance this knowledge alongside the risk to the health of our patients and staff presented by a novel coronavirus.

Chair: Philip Lewer

Chief Executive: Dr Owen Williams OBE

Following the publication of “Supporting pregnant women using maternity services during the coronavirus pandemic: Actions for NHS providers” on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020, we have completed the necessary risk assessments and are now looking for creative solutions to overcome challenges in order to maximise support to pregnant women. Timescales and changes will be published in due course on our Facebook page and Maternity web page (see below) although there are no easy ‘quick’ solutions. We will prioritise the aspects of care that you have told us is **your priority** for needing support through your feedback.

The aim of this new NHS guidance is for women to have access to their support person throughout all stages of their maternity journey; however it clearly states that the **priority** is to prevent and control COVID-19 infection and keep women and staff safe.

**Therefore forthcoming changes to hospital visiting restrictions will be based on the following premise:**

1. All women should nominate a birth partner at their booking appointment and that is the only person who can accompany the woman when restrictions do not apply. The nominated person must live in the same household or be in a support bubble, as per Government guidance.
2. The woman and her birth partner must wear a blue surgical mask whilst at hospital appointments and visits. You can buy these in most shops or we can supply on arrival.
3. Birth partners who test positive for Covid-19, who have been identified through NHS track and trace as requiring to self-isolate, or are symptomatic and awaiting a test result must not attend any maternity contact.
4. For hospital appointments, women and birth partners are screened on arrival using the pre-screening questions and their temperature checked. Any birth partners with a temperature above 37.8 are asked to leave. Any woman with a temperature above 37.8 is discussed with the lead clinician and a clinical risk assessment undertaken to consider the urgency of the appointment.

We would also ask that you follow any instructions from staff carefully. We are sorry that you may not be able to enjoy the full ‘normal’ experience as you would have done before this pandemic. We realise this is not ideal and we thank you for your patience and understanding of the situation we are facing together.

### **Information about your antenatal care and support during pregnancy**

**Your Midwife:** Our midwives are here to support and care for you and your baby. You should be allocated a ‘named midwife’ at your booking appointment and their name will be on your pink notes and online notes. We aim to offer continuity of care by the same midwife or a member of her team, but during the pandemic this may not always be possible.

**Schedule of care:** Routine appointments for a first time mother-to-be usually take place at approximately (in weeks) 8 / 16 / 25 / 28 / 31 / 34 / 36 / 38 / 40 / 41 (plus scans at 12 and 20 weeks). However care is personalised to each woman so your appointments may be slightly different and your midwife should discuss this with you. During the pandemic some appointments may be conducted by phone or video if a physical examination is not essential, this is more likely to happen before 28 weeks. You should always know when your next appointment will be, or when and how to arrange it.

**Late or Missed appointments:** Due to the unpredictable nature of maternity care and the need to prioritise urgent situations, sometimes our clinics or home visits can run later than planned. We aim to keep you informed where there are delays. If you do not want to wait in a busy waiting room you may prefer to sit in your car, but please ensure we are aware and have your current phone number. If you think you have been overlooked or you think your appointment has been missed, please speak to a member of the team in person or by phone (see below) as soon as possible.

**Your online notes:** You should be offered access to your online maternity notes so that you can read the notes made at your appointments and check your information. If you have any problems or cannot access your online notes please text or phone Emma on 07795 825174 to re-set your password.

**Maternity Advice Lines (MAL):** Community Midwives are usually working in busy clinics each day and also attend home visits and births. To ensure you have access to a midwife when you need it, we operate MAL phone lines for **non-urgent queries** where you can speak to a midwife Monday to Friday between 8.30am -12.30pm & 1.00pm – 4.00pm.

MAL Calderdale: 01422 261364      MAL Huddersfield: 01484 355743

**Early Pregnancy Unit (EPAU):** You can contact EPAU directly if you have bleeding or abdominal pain in early pregnancy. EPAU - 01422 224415

**Maternity Assessment Centre (MAC):** After 16 weeks, if you are worried about your own health or your baby you can call to speak to a midwife 24 hours a day 7 days a week. You may be given advice over the phone or invited in for further assessment. MAC: 01422 224392.

**Maternity Website:** You can find more information about your pregnancy and our services on our web pages, including useful contact numbers. We encourage you to make this your first port of call when looking for information as we signpost to reliable sources of information and local information [www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/maternity-services](http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/maternity-services)

**Facebook:** follow us at “**Better Births at Calderdale & Huddersfield**” where we share service updates, pregnancy and parenting information and your birth stories. New parents have told us that reading about other people’s experiences of being in hospital and of birth stories during the pandemic have been very useful and reassuring to them.

**Antenatal classes:** we have not been able to hold any face to face antenatal classes since the start of the pandemic. Instead we have put together online ‘modules’ that can be accessed freely on our ‘What’s On’ page, please do take a look! We will advertise any virtual classes that we are able to offer on the What’s On page <https://whatsonmaternity.cht.nhs.uk>

**Virtual Tour:** We have created a comprehensive online tour of our Maternity Services which can be viewed on our web page, on You Tube or on the Facebook page.

**Health Visitors:** Around 34-36 weeks of pregnancy your health visitor will get in touch to do a ‘pre-birth’ visit. Health visitors monitor the health and wellbeing of your baby after you are discharged from maternity services. If you have not heard from your health visitor by this time, you can contact Locala Health Visiting directly:

- Calderdale single point of contact: 0300 3045076
- Kirklees single point of contact: 0300 304 5555

**Mental Health:** We offer a mental health assessment at booking and again at 28 weeks. If you find yourself struggling, please speak to your midwife or contact your local services directly. If you are registered with a GP in Calderdale, Kirklees or Wakefield, you can access a free 24 hour helpline for advice or immediate support: 0800 183 0558. If you live in Bradford please phone My Wellbeing College: 0300 555 5551.

**COVID-19 information:** We receive guidance from the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists (RCOG) who also publish advice and guidance for pregnant women. Some of this is in video form and can be found on their website [www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)

**Staying Safe:** It is important that you attend your antenatal appointments to monitor you and your baby's wellbeing. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or are self-isolating, please phone the relevant clinic for advice before attending. If at any time you are worried about yourself or your baby, please get in touch promptly even if you have COVID-19 symptoms.

Remember to follow national, local and hospital guidance to keep yourself and your baby safe from COVID-19 including:

- Good and frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds
- Use hand gel after touching anything outside your home
- Use tissues to catch coughs & sneezes (Catch it, bin it, kill it)
- Distance yourself 2metres away from others
- Wear a clean face mask each time

**Staying Healthy:** to help your natural immune system aim to eat a healthy well balanced diet with lots of fruit and vegetables. Take pregnancy vitamins or Vitamin D 10mcg and get out for a walk in the fresh air at least once a day.

**Smoking:** If you smoke, stopping is the most important thing you and your partner can do to reduce the risk of harm to your baby. In addition, the available evidence (June 2020) suggests that smoking is associated with increased severity of disease and death in hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Local stop smoking services are available through telephone support and vouchers for medication to help you to quit, this is free during pregnancy. You can ask your midwife to refer you, or contact your local service directly:

Calderdale 01422 262373    Huddersfield 07817 579995    Bradford 01274 438884

**Covid Worry Line:** Please call or text 07717 517563. If you feel lonely, lost or unsure what to do, if you are worried about the pandemic and how it is affecting you; your job; your care; your mental health; your finances; your partner - please get in touch. A midwife will ring you (Mon-Fri) for a friendly supportive chat to help you with your issues. We are in this together.

Best wishes,

*Karen Spencer*

Associate Director of Nursing / Head of Midwifery