

The Journey Home

Funded Midwives Will Bring Birth Home For Many Alberta Moms

by Jane Baker

QUESTION

I was excited to learn that I will have the option of using a midwife for my next pregnancy without paying out of pocket, but I'm not sure I am confident about homebirth. Is it really a safe option?

ANSWER

Research has shown that homebirth is at least as safe as hospital birth. Alberta Midwives can attend women who give birth in a variety of birth settings including hospital, birth centre, or at home. The best person to judge where it will be safest for you to give birth is you. You need to give birth wherever you feel safe. Many women feel unsafe when people around them during labour do not share the same birth philosophy as they do.

Midwifery philosophy tells us that birth works best when a woman is not drugged or restricted to a bed or even a room. Women are designed to give birth and birth is a natural event that happens uniquely for each woman on her own schedule.

Wonderful caring people work in hospitals and lovely natural births happen there. But hospitals rely on the medical model, which is designed to intervene, monitor and heal a patient. This model works well if you are having surgery or are sick. It does not always translate well for normal, low risk labour and birth. Some women feel it will interfere with their bodies' natural process.

Many people feel birth in hospital is safer because technology is available "just in case". The key to having it available is knowing when to use it. There are situations where immediate obstetrical backup is necessary and life-saving. It

would be unsettling to think that giving birth at home might prevent a woman from receiving necessary care. However the reality is that there are very few times when a planned home birth with midwives becomes an emergency.

Midwives are trained in the art of normal birth. They allow each client to experience what is normal for them, and work to build a trusting relationship before the "birthday" arrives. They are also trained to recognize problems in pregnancy and birth. If a midwife believes there is a medical problem with mom or baby that can't be handled at home, there is usually time for a discussion about it, and the family is then transferred to a place designed to deal with a medical problem – the hospital.

Many couples choose home birth to have more control over the environment and the attendants at their birth. They want to ensure the people at their birth will support all of their choices. They trust the birth process, midwifery care and their own ability to make safe, responsible choices for themselves and their families. Homebirth is safe – especially when you feel safe at home. ■

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photo courtesy of Michelle Wells Photography

SAFETY BY NUMBERS

Low risk women who plan a homebirth with midwives are not more likely to die nor are their babies than those who plan low risk hospital births, according to a study of 5,418 women who planned a homebirth in the U.S. and Canada in 2000.

Women who planned a homebirth were much less likely to experience birth-related medical interventions. Compared with low risk hospital births, intended home births showed lower rates of induction (2.1% versus 21.0%), electronic fetal monitoring (9.6% versus 84.3%), episiotomy (2.1% versus 33.0%) and cesarean section (3.7% versus 19.0%).

Source: Johnson, Kenneth C and Daviss, Betty-Anne. *BMJ Homebirth & Midwives Study 2005*; and *CPM 2000 Summary*. Both accessed at www.birthpartnershipmidwives.com