

Thinking about a home birth?

Information for women, birthing parents and carers



**Maternity
Services**

With you every step of the way

This leaflet is for women and birthing people who are planning a home birth and want more information before deciding.

This leaflet explains what a home birth involves and helps you to make a decision that feels right for you.

You can talk about your choices with your midwife at any time during your pregnancy, and you can change your mind at any stage.

What is a home birth?

A home birth means planning to give birth in your own home, supported by NHS midwives. Sherwood Forest Hospitals does not have a separate midwifery-led unit (birth centre). This means the local birth options available are planned home birth or birth in the consultant-led Sherwood Birthing Unit at King's Mill Hospital.

During labour:

- You will be cared for by two midwives during labour and birth.
- You will receive the same standard of maternity care as in a hospital.

If needed, transfer to hospital can be arranged.

Your choice

Choosing where to give birth is part of your personalised care.

You can:

- Ask about home birth at any time.
- Take time to think about your options.
- Change your plans during pregnancy or labour.
- Request additional support if you would like more information about your options.

Who might consider a home birth?

Home birth is often suitable for women and birthing people who:

- Have an uncomplicated pregnancy.
- Are expecting one baby.
- Go into labour between 37 and 42 weeks.

However:

- Every pregnancy is different.
- Some women and birthing people with additional risks or needs may still choose a home birth.
- You will be offered an individualised discussion and care plan.

What are the possible benefits of a home birth?

Some women and birthing people choose a home birth because it may:

Provide comfort and familiarity:

- Being in your own environment.
- Having control over your space and surroundings.

Support one-to-one care:

- Continuous care from a midwife.
- Care tailored to your preferences.

Reduce the chance of some interventions

Research shows that for women and birthing people with uncomplicated pregnancies, planned home birth is associated with:

- Lower rates of assisted birth (forceps or ventouse).
- Lower rates of caesarean birth.
- Less use of medical pain relief.

Support personalised care:

- Freedom to move and choose positions.
- Ability to use water (if a birth pool is available).
- A more individual approach to your birth environment.

Many women and birthing people describe feeling:

- More relaxed.
- More in control.
- More satisfied with their experience.



Understanding outcomes in different birth settings

For women and birthing people with uncomplicated pregnancies, serious complications are uncommon whether birth is planned at home or in hospital. Sherwood Forest Hospitals does not have a separate midwifery-led unit (birth centre), so the main local birth choices are planned home birth or birth in the consultant-led obstetric unit at King's Mill Hospital.

For your baby

Serious complications during birth are uncommon in all settings:

- Around 4 in 1,000 births (approximately 0.4%, or about 1 in 250 babies).

If you are having your first baby:

- Around 9 in 1,000 babies (0.9%, or about 1 in 110) experience a serious complication when birth is planned at home.
- Around 5 in 1,000 babies (0.5%, or about 1 in 200) experience a serious complication when birth is planned in an obstetric unit.

If you have had a baby before:

Outcomes for babies are similar whether birth is planned at home or in an obstetric unit.

For you (interventions)

Women and birthing people with uncomplicated pregnancies who plan a home birth are less likely to experience medical interventions during labour and birth.

Planned birth in an obstetric unit:

- Around 25–30% (about 1 in 4 to 1 in 3) have a caesarean birth.
- Around 10–15% (about 1 in 10) have an assisted vaginal birth (forceps or ventouse).

Overall, around 35–45% may have one of these interventions.

Planned home birth:

- Around 5–10% (about 1 in 20 to 1 in 10) have a caesarean birth.
- Around 5–10% (about 1 in 20 to 1 in 10) have an assisted vaginal birth.

Overall, around 10–20% may have one of these interventions.

Transfer to hospital

If you are planning a home birth:

- Around 45% of women and birthing people having their first baby will transfer to hospital during labour or shortly after birth (about 1 in 2).
- Around 10–12% of those who have given birth before will transfer to hospital (about 1 in 10).

Most transfers are not emergencies and commonly occur because labour is progressing more slowly than expected, additional pain relief is requested, or further assessment is recommended.

Are there any risks or other things to think about?

It is important to understand both benefits and risks so you can make an informed decision.

For the baby:

- If you are having your first baby, there is a small increase in risk of complications for the baby compared with planned hospital birth.
- For those who have already had a baby, outcomes are similar to hospital birth for uncomplicated pregnancies.

For you:

- Some pain relief options (such as epidural) are only available in hospital.
- If complications arise, transfer to hospital may be recommended.

Transfer to hospital

Transfer is common and usually not an emergency.

Reasons for transfer may include:

- Labour taking longer than expected.
- Request for epidural pain relief.
- Concerns about you or your baby.

Transfer is usually:

- Planned and calm.
- Supported by your midwife.
- By ambulance or private transport.

You will continue to receive care throughout.

Planning a home birth

If you are considering a home birth, your midwife will support you to plan safely.

This will include:

- Discussion about your pregnancy and any risks.
- Development of a personalised care plan.
- Information about what to expect.

Your plan will be reviewed throughout your pregnancy.

What do I need to prepare?

- Towels and protective covers.
- Comfortable clothing.
- Food and drinks.
- A warm and clean space.

If you would like to use a birth pool:

- You will need to arrange hire or purchase.
- Your midwife can advise.

What happens during labour at home?

When you think you are in labour:

- You will contact Maternity Triage: 01623676170
- Midwives will attend when appropriate.

Midwives will:

- Monitor your wellbeing and your baby's wellbeing.
- Support your comfort and choices.
- Provide care based on your individual needs.



When might transfer to hospital be recommended?

Transfer may be recommended if:

- Labour is not progressing as expected.
- You would like different pain relief.
- There are clinical concerns.

Your midwife will explain this clearly and support you throughout.

Shared decision-making

Your care is based on shared decision-making.

This means:

- You will be given clear, balanced information. You can ask for this to be explained in a way that makes sense to you.
- You can ask questions and discuss concerns.
- Your preferences, values and beliefs will be respected.

You are at the centre of all decisions about your care.

How do I request a home birth?

If you are interested in planning a home birth:

- Speak to your midwife at any appointment.
- Your wishes will be documented in your care plan.
- Further discussions or reviews can be arranged if needed.

You can request a home birth at any stage of pregnancy.

Things to be aware of:

- Home birth services depend on staffing availability.
- In rare situations, the service may need to be temporarily changed. If this happens, your midwife will discuss alternative plans with you.

You will always be supported to access safe care.

Key messages:

- Home birth is a supported NHS option.
- It is a safe choice for many women and birthing people.
- It is associated with fewer interventions for those with uncomplicated pregnancies.
- Some women and birthing people will need transfer to hospital.
- You will be supported to make the decision that feels right for you.

Contact your community midwife if:

- You are thinking about a home birth.
- You have questions or would like more information.
- Your preferences change.
- You have any concerns about your pregnancy.

Important

This leaflet provides general information and does not replace advice from your midwife or doctor.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202606-01-THB
Created: June 2026 / Review Date: June 2028