

Patient-Centered Care for Pregnant Patients choosing Home Birth during the COVID-19 Pandemic August 2020

During the World Health Organization International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife as midwives caring for pregnant people and their families, we daily see the stress and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has on individual decision-making regarding place of birth. The decision for place of birth becomes more complicated related to the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in each setting and the new policies some settings are instituting related to number of support persons allowed, separation of infant, breast feeding and visitation. The pandemic also exaggerates the existing unacceptable health inequities caused by structural racism in clinical practice and healthcare systems. Birthing within community can be protective against adverse outcomes for people of color.¹ ACNM is committing to the work of dismantling structural racism and advocates that people should have full agency over their healthcare decisions. In our *Position Statement on Planned Home Birth (2015)*² the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) affirms that planned home birth should be accessible to healthy people who desire to give birth at home.

The American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM) supports midwives and models of care committed to:

- ensuring parents and families are supported and their feelings validated
- facilitating processes for shared responsibility and informed decision-making regarding place of birth
- delivering evidenced-based, respectful, person-centered care.

During the pandemic and beyond, families evaluating their options for place of birth should have access to the most accurate health information about safety and risk. Midwives are central to the health and protection of the family during pregnancy, childbirth, and in the critical early days and months once a baby is born.³ The most well-designed research has demonstrated outcomes to be similar for births across settings when there is an integrated system of care providing for timely transfer when indicated.^{4,5}

ACNM supports birthing at home for pregnant people and recognizes that optimal outcomes are achieved when:

- They have quality, screening for maternal and neonatal risk;
- Are attended by a midwife whose education meets or exceeds the International Confederation of Midwives Global Standards for Midwifery Education and are licensed within their state of practice; and
- Care is provided within an integrated, supportive system for safe, seamless and timely transfer within the context of written practice guidelines.

Respectful prenatal, birth, and postpartum care that strives for health equity is essential to the well-being of pregnant people, newborns, families and our communities. We as professionals reiterate our

commitment to delivering care in the safest, most respectful and culturally congruent way possible, including using best practices for responsive inter-professional communication and consultation, collaboration and bi-directional transfer of care.⁵ In alignment with ACNM Standards, practices caring for people in communities across all care settings are instituting clinical practice guidelines that specifically address Covid-19 utilizing the most current understanding relevant to infection prevention and screening.⁶

Effective communication is especially critical in this time of uncertainty and we encourage families to discuss their concerns with their chosen birth team. Both the midwife and the pregnant person considering birth at home should openly discuss and understand the conditions impacting urgent or emergency transfer to a hospital. Hospitals continue to navigate difficult conditions and challenges caused by the pandemic. It is imperative that midwives maintain clear communication with emergency medical services and receiving maternity care providers to ensure safety and maintain dignity for families during this critical time.

ACNM is committed to working in concert with other stakeholders, organizations and institutions to assure optimal outcomes and reduce barriers for families safely choosing birth in the home setting.

References:

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Created by: the Home and Birth Center Committee of the Division for Advancement of Midwifery
Michelle Palmer, Chair

Affirmed by:

Cathy Collins-Fulea, President ACNM
Jessica Brumley Vice-President ACNM

Sheri Sesay-Tuffour CEO
Sharon Ryan, Director MPEGO
Amy Kohl, Director Advocacy and Government Affairs

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