

Emergency Preparedness for Childbirth



Unexpected events—such as earthquakes, floods, and terrorist attacks—can cause widespread problems. Although these situations are rare, you can plan for labor and birth at home if a disaster prevents you from getting to a hospital or birth center. Birth has occurred in homes for centuries and can be very safe if you are prepared.

Call for Help

Keep an up-to-date contact list of anyone who may be able to come to help you with the birth. Keep the family car filled with gas if you are getting close to your due date. If you do go into labor during a disaster, first try to reach your midwife, doctor, or hospital. If you can't reach your health care provider, call 911. If you have telephone service, a health care provider or 911 operator can 'talk you through' labor and birth.

Prepare the Room

Cover the bed with a shower curtain and then place a clean sheet over the shower curtain so you keep the mattress from getting wet. Have your front door unlocked so that rescue workers can get into your home. Get your kit of supplies out and have it open by your bed. The other side of this handout lists the steps your helper will take if you do not have a health care provider available when you give birth.

Supplies You Will Need

Giving Birth "In Place" A Guide to Emergency Preparedness for Childbirth has instructions for managing birth and for how to handle emergencies. It is a good idea to get this handout and keep it with your supplies. You can get a free copy of *Giving Birth* from <http://mymidwife.org/Guide-to-Emergency-Childbirth>.

The items in this list of supplies can be found at any drug store, and they can be kept in a waterproof bag away from children or pets.

Supplies for Giving Birth at Home

For Preparing the Bed and During Labor	For the Birth	For the Baby
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-sized under pads with plastic backing • 4 bath towels • Small bottle of isopropyl alcohol • Box of disposable sterile gloves • Small bottles of hand sanitizer • Large sanitary pads • Flashlight (that doesn't require batteries) • Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Giving Birth in Place: A Guide to Emergency Preparedness for Childbirth</i> • Instructions for adult and baby cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) • Emergency contact list • Scissors and white shoe laces that have been in boiling water for 10 minutes then wrapped in a sterile glove (for tying and cutting the umbilical cord) • A large bowl and 2 plastic bags for the placenta • A few large trash bags for dirty laundry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby blankets • Newborn hat • Baby-sized bulb syringe • Clothing • Disposable diapers • A package of large cotton balls • A hot water bottle to keep • Mom prepared to breastfeed

Instructions for Your Helper During Labor

Stay calm and keep the area as clean as possible. Help keep the mom comfortable. Place some towels under her to catch fluid when the bag of waters breaks and for vaginal bleeding that can occur during labor. The first stage of labor can last from a few hours to several hours. Once the mother starts grunting or pushing, the first stage is over, and the baby will be born soon. The pushing stage can last for just a few minutes but may last an hour or 2 if this is the mother's first baby.

Instructions for Your Helper During the Birth

When you start to see the head at the opening to the vagina, put on sterile gloves. If you don't have gloves, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.

1. As soon as the head is out, feel around the head to see if the cord is around the baby's neck. The cord is slippery, round, and feels jelly-like.
2. If the cord is around the neck, gently lift it over the head or push it back behind the shoulders.
3. If the shoulders do not come out immediately: Gently push the side of the baby's head toward the mother's back to help the shoulders come out and ask her to push. Once the shoulders are out, the rest of the body will come quickly.
4. If the shoulders still do not come out: Have the mom lie on her back and pull her knees up toward her chest, then ask her to push. This helps move her pelvis up and over the shoulders if they are stuck.

Instructions for Your Helper with the New Baby

1. When the baby is born, place the baby on the mother's bare chest and cover both of them with a blanket. Remove the first wet towel and keep them covered with dry blankets. Place a hat on the baby.
2. If the baby is not crying or breathing easily: Rub the baby's back up and down firmly. Do not spank or hold the baby upside down.
3. If the baby is still not crying or breathing easily: Turn the baby so he/she is looking up at the ceiling and tilt his/her head back to straighten the airway, and keep rubbing the back. Once the baby is breathing easily, he/she will turn pink. The baby's hands and feet will remain bluish for a few hours.
4. If the baby is gagging or turning blue: Use the bulb syringe to clear fluid from the nose and mouth. If the baby is still not breathing, start infant CPR.
5. Tie the umbilical cord in 2 places close together about 3 inches from the baby with the white shoestrings. Use a double knot for each. Cut the umbilical cord between the 2 tied-off sections with sterile scissors. There is no hurry to do this. The baby will do best if you wait until you cannot feel a pulse when you hold the umbilical cord between your fingers.

Instructions for Your Helper with the Placenta

1. The placenta will be ready to come out within a few minutes to about 30 minutes after the birth. You may see a gush of blood and the umbilical cord get longer when the placenta is ready to deliver. Place the bowl next to the mother's vagina and ask her to push out the placenta. It will come out with some bleeding and fluid. Put the placenta in plastic bags.
2. As soon as the placenta is out, the mother's bleeding will be like bleeding from a heavy period. Getting the baby to breastfeed is very important, because it will slow down the bleeding after birth.

For More Information

Giving Birth "In Place" A Guide to Emergency Preparedness for Childbirth

<http://mymidwife.org/Guide-to-Emergency-Childbirth>

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Note: This handout is not a do-it-yourself guide for a planned home birth, nor is it all the information you need for every emergency. It is not intended to replace the skill of a health care professional.