



Women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of the *Women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth policy* (the policy) is to assist, educate and enable midwives and medical practitioners to care safely for healthy pregnant women who choose to use the bath and/or pool during all stages of their labour and birth.

This document supersedes OD 0417/13 *Clinical guidelines for women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth*.

2. Applicability

This policy is applicable to all Health Service Providers (HSPs) and contracted health entities who provide care for mothers (and their infants) and healthy pregnant women who choose to use the bath and/or pool during labour and birth.

3. Policy Requirements

This policy requires midwives and medical practitioners to assist, educate and care safely for healthy pregnant women who choose to use the bath and/or pool during all stages of their labour and birth. Midwives and medical practitioners to whom this policy is applicable must comply with the following requirements:

- The *Statewide clinical guidelines for women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth* (the guidelines) when healthy women choose to use water immersion during labour and/or birth.
- If a woman is considering the use of immersion in water during labour and/or for birth, it must be discussed by the health professional with the woman and her support people during pregnancy to enable the woman to make a fully informed decision, as per the Inclusion Criteria in the guidelines.
- Each maternity service must consider workforce issues such as:
 - the availability of appropriate maternity staff;
 - staffing levels; and
 - the presence of staff who are suitably trained in the use of water for labour and/or birth to ensure the service can be safely provided.
- An *agreement form* as found in Appendix 4 of the guidelines must be completed and documented after discussion with the woman, preferably during the antenatal period of her choice to use water during labour and/or birth.

- The midwife or medical practitioner must be confident and competent to facilitate a woman's labour and/or birth in water as per the competency tool requirements found in Appendix 3A of the guidelines.
- The midwife and/or medical practitioner must ensure the woman has received and read the guidelines and the *Labour and Birth Using Water Consumer Brochure (WNHS 2009)* as per the competency tool requirements found in Appendix 3A of the guidelines.
- The midwife or support person must remain with the woman at all times to maintain safety whilst she is immersed in water.
- Staff must be trained in, and have practiced emergency drills in the correct procedure to assist the woman to leave the water in an emergency situation.
- Each maternity service that offers immersion in water for labour and/or birth must undertake periodic audit and evaluation to ensure adherence to the guidelines.
- For maternity services offering immersion in water for labour and/or birth as a new service, it is recommended that an audit will be undertaken six (6) months following implementation.

4. Compliance monitoring and evaluation

HSPs are required to monitor their compliance with this mandatory policy. HSPs and contracted health entities are responsible and accountable for their own outcomes and for ensuring they remain informed regarding the safe use of water during labour and/or birth.

An Audit Tool found in Appendix 5 of the guidelines currently exists as an example for HSPs and contracted health entities to use to evaluate the implementation of this policy. HSPs and contracted health entities must use a version of this Audit Tool to ensure compliance.

Statewide information on the clinical outcomes of the use of water immersion for pain relief during labour and/or birth will be recorded and monitored by Health Networks using the Stork database and/or other clinical perinatal database.

The System Manager may also request reports on the compliance with this policy from HSPs and contracted health entities to evaluate policy compliance and clinical outcomes as well as to determine the effectiveness of this policy in guiding the provision of safe and quality care to mothers and their newborns.

5. Related documents

The following documents are required to give affect to this policy (i.e. the documents included are mandatory):

- [Statewide clinical guidelines for women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth](#)
- [Consumer Brochure - Labour and Birth Using Water](#)

6. Supporting information

The following documents inform this policy (i.e. documents that are not mandatory to the implementation of this policy but may support the implementation of the policy):

- [Report on the introduction of the statewide policy and clinical guidelines](#)

7. Definitions

Refer to the *Statewide clinical guidelines for women requesting immersion in water for pain management during labour and/or birth* for further clarification and information.

Water Birth	“Water birth means where a baby is born fully submerged into water. The baby’s head must remain submerged under water until after the body is born, then the baby is brought to the surface immediately. The baby’s head must not be submerged again”. Water births are associated with low risks for both the woman and baby when best practice guidelines are followed.
Water immersion for first and second stage of labour	“Water immersion during the first stage of labour significantly reduces epidural/spinal analgesia requirements and reported maternal pain, without adversely affecting labour duration, operative delivery rates, or neonatal wellbeing. Immersion in water during the second stage of labour increased women's reported satisfaction with pushing”.

8. Policy owner

For inquiries related to this mandatory policy:

Womens and Newborns Health Networks, Development Officer
Health Networks Branch

Enquiries relating to this mandatory policy may be directed to:
healthpolicy@health.wa.gov.au

9. Review

This mandatory policy will be reviewed as required to ensure relevance and recency. At a minimum it will be reviewed within five (5) years after first issue and at least every five (5) years thereafter.

Version	Effective from	Effective to	Amendment(s)
MP 0049/17 v.1.0	03 April 2017	03 April 2022	Original version

The review table indicates previous versions of the mandatory document and any significant changes.

10. Approval

This mandatory policy has been approved and issued by the Director General of the Department of Health.

Approval by	Dr David Russell-Weisz, Director General, Department of Health
Approval date	01 March 2017
Published date	03 April 2017
RMR#	F-AA-50247



This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

© Department of Health 2017

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia”.