

Birth & Maternity

To ensure healthy pregnancies and healthy starts in life we intend to:

Emphasise the normality of childbirth and ensure women have information, education and choice. We will pay particular attention to those who are more vulnerable, so that we promote healthy pregnancies for all women and healthy starts for every baby.

We know:

- Effective health and social care at this early stage is of fundamental importance to improve the long-term health of the population. Information and education before pregnancy, then co-ordinated care throughout it, are key to this - especially among those who are more vulnerable.
- In Devon there are more than 6,000 babies born each year, and public health statistics indicate this will rise slightly in some parts of Devon but fall in others over the next 10 years. The percentage of Devon women giving birth at home is more than double the national rate of 2.14%. Teignbridge and West Devon are national leaders with 14% of all births being home births.
- For mothers having their babies in hospital, the length of time they stay varies from 1.5 days in some parts of Devon to 2.4 days (the seventh highest in England) in others. In Devon, about 10% of all women and babies transfer to a second hospital as part of their care.
- National direction emphasises choice, access, safety and continuity of care with the option of home birth, birth in local facilities under the care of midwives, and birth under the care of a consultant when this is the most appropriate.
- The integration of midwifery care is important to ensure co-ordination and quality across the whole team involved in birth and maternity care. At present, arrangements for this vary across Devon.
- Births to teenage mothers account for 6.2% of all births in Devon. Smoking during pregnancy is higher in younger women in Devon, with almost a third of all teenage mothers smoking at delivery.
- Breastfeeding initiation rates are similar to the national rate overall but there is a 10% variation in uptake across Devon. Even when deprivation is taken into account the variation is still high. Breastfeeding is known to be strongly associated with positive health outcomes.

We will:

- Ensure high-quality care before pregnancy with easily-available advice and information for all, with targeted support for those who are more vulnerable and at risk. Women will have direct access to midwives or maternity professionals for all aspects of their care.
- Ensure arrangements are in place to guarantee mothers a choice, promoting continuity and safety in maternity care, with home or midwife-led birthing centres at the heart of this choice.
- Clinically integrate community midwifery, including birthing units, with specialist obstetric services so that we achieve high-quality care and continuity across the whole span of care, from home birth to obstetrician-led care.
- Maintain the links between midwifery and primary care and extend the links with children's centres as they are developed in Devon, to achieve the best possible support.
- Develop services so that midwife-led birthing facilities can also provide clinical assessment, and so that women can have scans, routine appointments and admissions without delivery all in one place, as close to their homes as possible.
- Support mothers who are young or otherwise more vulnerable, to ensure the best possible care and start in life for every Devon baby. Learn from research and best practice to make sure we get this right.
- Ensure the most effective use of midwifery skills and more use of support workers, for example to promote breastfeeding. Review the key roles of staff providing parenting support to ensure attention is targeted on those who would benefit most.

- Require those who provide services to demonstrate they are implementing relevant national guidance and to supply reports on their performance in key areas such as Caesarean rates and breastfeeding initiation and maintenance.
- Involve users of the service and develop the role of maternity networks to achieve best practice.

We will achieve:

- The national guarantee of choice in maternity care, accompanied by an increase to 10% of babies born at home and 30% being born in maternity units by 2013.
- Where births take place in hospital, women and their babies will be supported to return home as soon as possible, with the length of stay at the national average or below by the end of 2008, and transfers to a second hospital for maternity care reducing by 50% by 2010.
- A teenage pregnancy rate of less than 20 per 1,000 by 2010, and a minimum 50% reduction in the under 18 rate in all areas of Devon by 2013.
- An improvement of 25% by 2010 in the numbers of mothers breastfeeding at six weeks, a reduction in smoking rates during pregnancy to no more than 5% by 2013, and a reduction in Caesarean section rates by 1% a year for the next 5 years.
- A clinically-integrated and co-ordinated midwifery arrangement in every part of Devon from April 2008, so that every woman having a baby experiences a service that provides maximum quality and continuity of care.

Case study

Matthew and Jo Jones, from North Tawton, went to Okehampton Hospital for the birth of all three of their children. This is Jo's account.

"I had our first child at Okehampton's old hospital. It was a good experience. When I became pregnant again I was invited to look around the new hospital. I liked the relaxing atmosphere and modern surroundings there. It wasn't until the big day itself, though, that I really appreciated what it had to offer.

"From the time I arrived I was treated like I was the only mother on the ward. I was given all the help I needed to make me feel at home; a single en suite bedroom, refreshments on tap and the help and support of staff 24-hours a day.

"When little Isaac popped into the world it wasn't only me and my husband he saw, but also our midwife, Heather. After the birth, she and other staff always found time to help me to breastfeed. They gave me space to be with my new baby - and time to rest.

"When the day came to go home, I knew where I wanted to have my next baby. A few years later, I returned. And I couldn't have been any more pleased when Heather once again handed me another member of our growing family."

having a baby

How it can be...

