

Why choose homebirth?

The Lancet is a weekly peer-reviewed general medical journal and these stats are from a report published in April 2020. The report included 16 studies of over 500K low-risk people intending to birth at home.

- 40% less likely to give birth by caesarean section
- 50% less likely to give birth by operative vaginal birth (forceps/ventouse)
- 70% less likely to use an epidural
- 55% less likely to have an episiotomy
- 40% less likely to have a 3rd or 4th degree tear
- 75% fewer reporting of maternal infection
- 60% less likely to receive oxytocin augmentation of labour

The place where you feel most comfortable, safe & relaxed is where oxytocin will thrive which means :

- A shorter labour
- Feeling more relaxed
- More comfortable labour
- Less chance of interventions
- Less likely to have a post partum haemorrhage
- Increased chance of VBAC (Vaginal birth after caesarean)
- Less chance of getting an infection
- More comfortable for birth partner
- Being at home means there's no limit to number of birth partners
- You can guarantee access to a pool via renting
- No need to sort childcare/ petcare
- Studies show that home birth is as safe as hospital for first time birthers and safer than hospital for second time birthers.

In 2019, a large systematic review and meta-analysis was published in The Lancet. It looked at 14 studies including data from around 500,000 intended home births. The authors found that, "The risk of perinatal or neonatal mortality was not different when birth was intended at home or in hospital." (Hutton et al 2019).





What if there's an emergency? An analysis of home birth transfer rates

A systematic review done in 2014 looked at home births and the number of transfers to hospital as well as the reasons. When looking at transfer rates, it's important to break these stats down, as this is often given as a reason first time parents shouldn't birth at home. This is based on the transfer rate being higher for first time birthers.

This study looked at 215,257 women and found that overall, the transfer rate from home to hospital was between 9.9% and 31.9%. Of these transfers, only a small percentage were true emergencies:

- Stalled/slow labour - 5.1% to 9.8%
- foetal distress - 1% to 3.6%
- postpartum haemorrhage 0% to 0.2%
- infant respiratory problems 0.3% to 1.4%
- emergency transfers 0% to 5.4%

The majority of transfers took place during labour and before birth of baby (between 8.4% to 24.1%). Between 1.7% and 7.3% of transfers took place after the birth, but classification of transfers after birth varied between 2 hours and 5 days, which skews these figures massively and again could be argued that the true transfer rate to be smaller when considering safety of home birth. The 0-5.4% of "emergency transfers" (and these are the ones that people tend to worry about as they are believed to need an ambulance) included reasons arguably not a true blue light emergency such as failure to progress and meconium. In one of the studies, transfer by ambulance classed the transfer as an emergency, but simply being transferred by ambulance does not necessarily mean it was an emergency, purely that someone called an ambulance. For these reasons, potentially the emergency transfer figure may be in reality much smaller.

The risk of transfer for first time birthers was higher (between 23.4% and 45.4%) in comparison to subsequent births (between 5.8% and 12%). Across both these groups, slow labour was the most common reason.

They found transfer rates much higher when birth was attended by a midwife from an integrated setting, versus home births attended by independent midwives. This may be explained by the stricter rules in place by NHS and hospital midwives who are obliged to recommend transfer compared to autonomous independent midwives who can watch and wait.

We know that hospital guidelines state a specified rate of progression of labour, and if this is not demonstrated, intervention is recommended (sometimes unnecessarily). A specific UK study compared births supported by NHS midwives versus independent midwives and found that only 0.4% of NHS midwife supported births were home births compared to 66% of births assisted by independent midwives. It's very apparent that the NICE guidelines and policies NHS midwives have to follow influence the choices a pregnant person makes.

When choosing a birth place, or arguably any decision regarding your birth, it's important to have access to research, information and statistics to help inform that decision.

Thanks to Erin @ <https://www.better-birth.co.uk/post/but-what-if-there-s-an-emergency-analysis-of-home-birth-transfer-rates>

References:

Blix, E., Kumle, M., Kjærgaard, H. et al. Transfer to hospital in planned home births: a systematic review. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 14, 179 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2393-14-179>

Things to consider with a homebirth :

- The distance to the nearest hospital
- Space - Do you have an area that you can use to birth?
- Mess - Home birth is really not as messy as you might think but it helps to be prepared with shower curtains, towels and blankets you don't mind getting a bit messy, it will probably wash off! The midwives will have incontinence sheets with them which they will put down to protect things if the placenta is delivered on the sofa for example. Lots of people layer up their bed sheets with mattress protector, sheet, mattress protector, sheet and then just strip off the top layers to get rid of any mess before getting into a nice clean bed! The midwives will pack away all their incontinence sheet and help gather up things like messy towels etc. You'll be surprised how quickly it looks like nothing happened!
- Comfort Measures - At home there are not the same options of pain relief as more clinical settings and although these methods are rarely necessary due to increased oxytocin and endorphins, it can be useful to have other comfort measures at hand.
- A TENS machine, massage, aromatherapy and water are all great relief.

- A birth pool is a lovely relaxing way to keep comfortable and can be great for keeping everything contained too! They are easily purchased or rented and easy to set up and pack away again.
- A simple shower can be a lovely way to keep comfortable as the sensation on your skin is a lovely soothing distraction.
- Everyone is allowed a home birth - Many high risk people are still very safe to birth at home. Blanket policy does not fit every-one and policies can vary across the country. It is best to become informed and make your own decisions using the BRAIN tool and lots of research. If home birth is not safe for you and your baby then you will come to that conclusion and make the decision yourself. If you research your circumstances and feel that home birth is the best option for your family despite that being against your trusts recommendations then that is your right! You don't have to wait to have your home birth okayed by anyone if that's what you've decided on!
- Even if you are unsure, why not consider choosing a homebirth? You will be offered continuity of care, midwife appointment at home and you can plan to stay at home even if you decide in labour it's not where you are most relaxed, or wish stronger pain relief, you can transfer to hospital.

Info - Thanks to Jade & Alex @thebirthuprising 2022

Resources

1. Home Birth Support Group UK on Facebook (run by Samantha Gadsden- Doula) Why Not Home? Documentary
2. Why Home Birth Matters- book by Natalie Meddings
3. Birth Kweens Podcast Episodes- All About Home Birth Parts 1-3 (episodes 103-105) The Birthplace Cohort Study
4. A vaginal birth in the mother's own environment is optimal for 'seeding' a healthy microbiome for the baby (Penders et al. 2006).
5. https://www.sarawickham.com/research-updates/is_home_birth_safe/
6. <https://www.sarawickham.com/research-updates/further-confirmation-of-home-birth-safety/>
7. <https://evidencebasedbirth.com/what-is-home-birth/>
8. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(20\)30063-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(20)30063-8/fulltext)
9. <http://www.homebirth.org.uk/whatif.htm>
10. <https://midwiferytoday.com/mt-articles/safer-birth-barn>

Midwife Nadia says "Homebirth is my passion, I feel honoured that I regularly am present at births in this way".