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Warm water immersion during labour and birth

Maternity – patient information

Warm water immersion can be very effective for comfort and pain relief during labour. Warm water immersion provides support and a feeling of weightlessness that allows labouring women to relax by releasing muscle tension whilst also increasing production of endorphins, the body's natural pain-relieving hormone.

Why is the water temperature important?

During water immersion the midwife will monitor the water and your body temperature regularly. It is important that you do not overheat. The midwife will ask you to leave the bath to cool down if your temperature is too high. It is important to drink plenty of water to keep hydrated.

During water birth it is also important that the water temperature is similar to your body temperature (37-37.5 degrees Celsius) so that your baby has a smooth transition from being in-utero to being born underwater.



When to get into the bath?

Once you are having regular contractions. If in early labour, contractions can slow down. Talk to your midwife about when to get into the bath.

When to get out of the bath?

Most labour progresses without problems, however birth can be unpredictable and you and your baby's safety is our priority. Your midwife and doctor will ask you to leave the bath to further investigate.

Can I birth in the water?

Yes, if you meet eligible criteria.

Your baby will be born completely underwater, with no air contact until their head is brought to the surface. The baby will then be placed on your chest above the level of the water.

Is there an increased risk of infection?

There is no increased risk for a baby born in water compared to a baby born on land.

We follow infection prevention and control cleaning guidelines and regularly test the water quality. We ask that you don't use oil, soaps, creams and fragrances.

We change the bath water if it is contaminated.

Resource 7349.v1 | Reviewed 09.2025

Contact ddh_design@health.qld.gov.au for publishing information on this resource.



NSQHS Standard 2: Partnering with Consumers

We worked with our Darling Downs Health consumer group to create this resource for our communities.



Queensland Government

What about the umbilical cord?

Your baby's cord may snap under water causing your baby to lose blood until the cord is clamped. This is a rare event (1:800 births) and can happen during any birth. However, cord snap is more common during water birth because the bath is deep, and we need to bring the head to the surface of the water immediately after birth.

Are there any restrictions to warm water immersion in labour?

- You have a high temperature
- Your pregnancy is under 37 weeks or greater than 42 weeks
- You have an infection at the time of your labour
- Elevated Body Mass Index (BMI)
- You are pre-term labour
- You have had an epidural or recent strong pain relief
- You are pregnant with more than one baby
- You are unable to stand, enter and exit the bath on your own
- Your labour is not progressing normally
- You have any significant bleeding
- Your baby's heart rate is not normal
- Your baby's head is not lying in the correct position
- You have high risk medical or obstetric conditions

There may be circumstances where you are eligible to labour in water, but birthing in water is not recommended.

When things do not go according to plan

Labour and birth are unpredictable. Despite birth planning, sometimes things don't go according to plan. If your midwife or doctor have any concerns, water immersion may not be recommended.

Please be assured, even if you are unable to access warm water and/or water birth, you can still have a positive birth experience.

Can I still use water immersion if not recommended?

We strive to deliver the safest possible care while also respecting your decision to accept or decline our recommendations.

Our staff must meet the following obligations if you decline our recommendations:

- Your midwife *must* inform their team leader and doctor before you enter the pool.
- The doctor will ask to talk to you to explore alternatives to support your decision-making and partner with you to form and document a plan of care.
- You will be asked to sign your 'Care plan outside of recommended guideline' to acknowledge that you understand and agree with the care that has been discussed and planned.

Your questions

If you have any questions or need more information, please talk with your midwife or doctor.

References

[Fact sheet: Warm water immersion for labour and birth](#)

[Labour and birth—warm water immersion and water birth - Mater](#)

[Recommended maternity care - after you decline: information for women | Queensland Health](#)