
Hospital birth

Summary

- Most pregnant women who give birth in Victoria have their babies in a hospital.
 - Victoria's public hospitals provide safe, affordable and high-quality maternity care.
 - In both public and private hospitals, you will be cared for mostly by midwives during your labour.
 - If your birth does not go as planned, an obstetrician will take care of any procedures or operations you need, such as a caesarean.
 - Maternity care in public hospitals is free to Medicare card holders. In a private hospital, you and your private health fund (if you have one) will pay for most of your care.
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Most women who give birth in Victoria have their babies in a hospital. Whether you choose to use a public or private hospital is a personal choice and can depend on your financial situation, the distance to your nearest hospital and birthing preferences. Victoria's public hospitals provide safe, affordable and high-quality maternity care.

Visiting the maternity unit at the hospital where you will be giving birth will help prepare you for what to expect when you go into labour.

Having a baby in hospital

In both public and private hospitals, you will be cared for mostly by **midwives** during your labour.

A phone call to the hospital when you are in labour will let you know when it is time to come in.

When you arrive a midwife will:

- perform basic health checks such as taking your pulse and temperature and checking your blood pressure
- check your baby's position by feeling your abdomen
- listen to your baby's heart
- possibly do an internal examination to see how much your cervix has dilated (this will let the midwife know how far your labour has progressed).

Midwives will keep monitoring you and your baby with these checks throughout your labour. Be sure to ask if you have any questions.

During labour, you will be cared for by midwives. Depending on the choices you made about pregnancy care, these may be:

- a number of different midwives, depending on who is on shift – you may not have met these midwives before
- midwives from a small team of midwives who jointly cared for you during your pregnancy (midwifery group practice care)
- one known primary midwife and a backup midwife (caseload midwifery care)
- your own private midwife.

In a private hospital, or as a private patient in a public hospital, the midwives will keep in contact with your obstetrician, who will usually check in on you during your labour and will be there for the birth. In a public hospital, you will only see an obstetrician if there are complications or if you need an emergency procedure such as a caesarean.

After the birth, the midwives will care for you. Your **obstetrician** (if one attended the birth) will visit and check that you and your baby are okay.

In a public hospital, most women stay for about two days after a vaginal birth and for three or four days after a caesarean. In a private hospital, most stay for four days after a vaginal birth and five days after a caesarean. In both cases, if you and your baby are well and you are happy to go home, your stay could be shorter.

Public hospital care

To book in for a public hospital birth, you will need a referral from your GP. Which hospital you are referred to will depend on where you live, your health, your medical history and your preferences. You can discuss your options with your GP, but you will most likely be referred to the hospital closest to where you live.

Once you have your referral, you will then need to call the hospital's antenatal clinic to make your first appointment. Ask a friend, relative or healthcare worker if you need help to do this. If you have language or cultural needs, ask the hospital for help to meet these needs.

Many public hospitals now have birth centres run by midwives on site. If you live rurally, you might need to go to a larger regional hospital for the birth.

If you have the opportunity to choose your hospital, think about:

- your birthing preferences and if that hospital can accommodate them (for example, a water birth)
- the hospital's approach to care, its visitors policy and how it can accommodate your partner's needs
- services the hospital can offer after the birth.

Pregnancy care

Public hospitals today offer many **birthing options**. The choices you make will determine who cares for you and where. It is a good idea to talk through your options and preferences early in your pregnancy because some options might not be available at your closest hospital or might not be suitable for you because of your health.

The main pregnancy care options include:

- in-hospital clinic care
- midwives clinic
- shared care
- midwifery group practice
- team midwifery care (see the fact sheet **Pregnancy and birthing options** for more information).

Public hospital costs

In the public system the costs of having a baby in hospital are minimal. For Medicare card holders, the care is free. Other hospital costs, however, might include:

- tests and ultrasound scans, although you can often get a rebate through Medicare
- antenatal classes.

If you are being cared for under a 'shared care' model, you may also have to pay for your GP's fees.

If you elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital, this will incur extra costs. If you wish to talk to someone about costs, contact your hospital's private patient liaison officer, or your private health fund, if you have one.

For more information see the fact sheet **Paying for pregnancy, birth and newborn care**.

Private hospital care

Choosing your own obstetrician first might limit the choice of private hospitals you can attend for the birth because each obstetrician will only have arrangements in place with certain hospitals.

If you choose your private hospital first, the hospital can supply a list of obstetricians who practise there.

All private hospitals will give you the opportunity to take a tour, and many run information nights or offer virtual tours online. It is a good idea to take these opportunities so you are well prepared before labour begins.

Pregnancy care

With a private obstetrician, your appointments are likely to take place in their consulting rooms. Some obstetricians work in a team with other obstetricians, and many employ a midwife to help with routine checks, to organise tests and scans and to answer general questions about pregnancy and childbirth.

Private hospital costs

If you choose to give birth in a private hospital, you and your private health fund (if you have one) will pay for most of your care.

If you have private health insurance, make sure your cover includes maternity care and be mindful that some health funds have a waiting period before you can claim pregnancy-related expenses.

You can still have your baby in a private hospital if you do not have private health insurance, but it will be expensive.

Some of the costs you can expect with private hospitals include:

- hospital fees for your stay (how much will depend on whether you have private health insurance and what your policy covers)
- tests and ultrasound scans, although you can often get some money back through Medicare
- antenatal classes, but check with your fund for possible rebates.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Midwife

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