



Practice Guidance for Volunteer Doulas During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updated: 29 October 2020

Our priority is to maintain continuity of support for women experiencing disadvantage during pregnancy, birth and early parenting, whilst preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting our clients, volunteers, staff and wider community.

Please read this guidance carefully.

Metropolitan Melbourne has a specific reopening roadmap, relating to how many active coronavirus (COVID-19) cases are in the community and public health advice. Subject to public health advice and trigger points being met, some restrictions are being eased across Victoria.

This guidance applies from **11:59pm Tuesday 27 October** as Metropolitan Melbourne commences the Third Step of the Roadmap to reopening and is subject to change or extension at short notice.

This guidance is developed based on the advice provided by the Victorian Government and is in line with Birth for Humankind's COVID-safe plan.

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Contents

General Requirements	2
Use of Technology.....	3
Arrangements Between Primary and Backup Doulas.....	4
Providing Birth Support.....	4
Why have we made these decisions?	5
Additional support for clients	6
Appendix 1: Supporting Resources	7
Appendix 2: Birth for Humankind COVID-19 information sheet for clients	8



General Requirements

The Victorian Government has eased the Stage 4 stay at home restrictions in line with the guidance included in the stage roadmap for reopening which has a number of trigger points based on active case numbers and public health advice.

This guidance is based on advice provided by the Victorian government

Birth for Humankind is now directing doulas to resume face to face visits for all aspects of doula support as long as both doula and client are comfortable to resume face to face support. Permitted worker permits are no longer required for face to face visits.

- **Strictly observe the state government restrictions.** If you breach these restrictions at any point you must not provide in-person support to clients.
- **Explain to clients that attending health care or other pregnancy or maternal child related appointments** is an essential activity that is exempt from limits on travel and they may continue to attend these.
- **Explain to clients that the doula can visit them at home** as they are providing an essential service. However, this should only take place if the doula and everyone in the household is well and is happy to do so. Otherwise the service can be provided on the phone or online.
- **Ask clients whether they have been observing the Third step restrictions** before visiting. If they have not, all services should be provided remotely.

Birth for Humankind is now directing all volunteer doulas to:

- **Complete the COVID-19 Infection Control Training¹.** All doulas who are currently matched with clients will need to complete this training before any home visiting and email the completion certificate to the Doula Program Supervisors. It will take no more than 30 minutes.
- **Do not undertake home visits** unless you have completed the COVID-19 Infection Control Training. If you have completed the training and both you and your client are comfortable in doing so you may make home visits. Use your discretion to provide in-person support as required and when you have fully assessed the risks.
- **Wear a fitted face mask** during all face-to-face interactions including during home visits.
- **Maintain social distancing** requirements during all in-person meetings, including staying 1.5m apart, practising excellent hand hygiene, meeting in large or open areas, avoiding unnecessary physical contact, and using protective equipment (such as gloves) when appropriate. If social distancing is not respected, you have the right to terminate any meeting. We will support you to do so.

¹ COVID-19 Infection Control Training is available here: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training>



- Do not meet with clients under any circumstances if **either you or they are unwell, or have been exposed to someone who is unwell.**
- Ask your client before each meeting if either they or their close contacts have symptoms of, or **exposure to, COVID-19.**
- Only ever meet in-person if both you and your client are comfortable doing so. You are under **no obligation** to provide in-person support to a client at any time. Please tell us if you wish to avoid personal contact with clients. We understand and we will do our best to make other arrangements for the client to receive support.
- Please wear your **name badge** so that it is clear to authorities that you are working.

Providing Antenatal Support

Whilst providing antenatal support you must follow all general guidance (above) and the following:

- Most hospitals continue to request that women attend their appointments alone. If a woman wants your support during a clinic appointment, you can be with her via voice or video call. You can also be in touch with clients before or after their appointments to brief and debrief.
- All hospital based CBE classes have been cancelled. This means you may be the only professional who can provide CBE to your client. It is possible to do this via remote delivery or in person depending on the scope and needs; consider what resources you have that could be adaptable to this format and let us know if you would like to access online versions of our how to baby information sheets. We welcome your suggestions.
- Backup doulas should work with the primary doula to attend a face to face meeting or join in video calls and have some one-to-one video contact with clients to build rapport in case they are called to the birth. This should occur multiple times throughout the pregnancy as it will be more difficult for the client to get to know a backup doula if they can't meet in person. If required a back-up doula can meet a client face to face either at their home or in a public place, please use discretion and judgement about what is most appropriate for each client's circumstance.
- Does your client have any specific concerns about accessing services during COVID-19 and as Melbourne moves to ease restrictions? If so, please let us know so we can develop guidance and seek additional support where possible.

Use of Technology

- Ask your clients directly during your first (or next) contact with them:
 - What are their preferred platforms for video and audio communication (WhatsApp/Facetime/Skype/other)?
 - What are the barriers to using technology? Do they have the technology/data allowance/access to WiFi to enable them to use video calling or to access online learning;



do they need an interpreter or translated resources? If these are barriers for your client, please tell us immediately as we may be able to assist.

- It is currently only possible to connect to a telephone interpreter while in a video call with a client if a platform that can call phone such as Skype is being used. In these cases, an audio call is appropriate, as clear communication is more important than being able to see each other. Depending on the English level of the client and your relationship you may be able to start with a short video call to connect and say hello and then transfer to a telephone call where an interpreter can be added. If using skype with an interpreter these meetings must be booked well in advance.

Arrangements Between Primary and Backup Doulas

- As mentioned above, hospitals continue to only permit one named person throughout labour and birth; support people are not permitted to swap.
- Primary and backup doulas must communicate clearly with each other about arrangements for supporting a client in labour.
- If supporting a client at home, both doulas may attend if all agree with this, with respect to infection risk.
- Both doulas must understand that whichever doula attends hospital with the client will most likely have to remain with her for the duration of the labour. You will not be able to swap doulas for rest and relief. Please consider this in your planning and self-care.

Providing Birth Support

If providing in-person birth support, you must follow all general guidance (above) and the following:

- You must always wear a fitted face mask when supporting your client in hospital.
- Public hospitals in Melbourne continue to maintain their policy of only allowing one support person during labour and birth. This person is also able to visit on the postnatal ward for up to two hours per day. Please clearly communicate this to your client in advance, so that they can make an informed decision about who they want present during the birth.
- If you are providing essential care and support necessary for the patient's physical, emotional or social wellbeing that cannot be delivered by the health service care team or via electronic means, then you can visit a patient as required. This may be relevant to some Birth for Humankind clients. Please also clarify this with the hospital on arrival as the guidance is subject to change depending on your client's circumstances.
- The patient can only have one visitor at a time and the number and duration of visits should not exceed the time required to provide essential supports only. Please coordinate with your client's partner or other support person if they have one to plan your visits.
- If your client has no other birth support person, you will be permitted to enter the hospital with your client in labour and remain with them until they are ready to transfer to the postnatal ward.
- Upon admission, please respectfully answer any infection control questions asked of you by hospital staff.
- If your client is also supported by a partner or family member, she may choose them as her primary birth support person, so you will not be allowed to provide in-hospital support.



- Your client or her support person may contact you during the birth by voice or video call to request guidance and support, if you are happy to offer this.
- Do not delay your client from transferring to hospital. Know when to suggest transferring or calling an ambulance. It is important that we do not contribute to any increased risk of free birthing or Born Before Arrivals (BBAs). Birth for Humankind doulas do not attend freebirths.
- Wear gloves if offering physical support. Do not touch anything other than the client's body while wearing the gloves. Dispose of the gloves before touching anything else or when you have completed the task.
- As COVID-19 is carried by respiratory droplets, please avoid being within a woman's breathing space, especially if she is using gas and air.
- Consider how you can offer hands-off comfort measures during labour and birth support.

Providing Postnatal Support

- Depending on individual hospital policy and who the woman has to support her, you may or may not be permitted to visit her in hospital. In many cases, only partners are permitted to visit.
- Postnatal information provision and education can be provided via home visit can be negotiated if both you and the client are comfortable to do so. Where appropriate, postnatal information provision and education can continue to be provided via video calls and online resources.
- No doula should feel obliged to provide in-home postnatal support.
- Ask clients directly if they are comfortable to receive in-home support. Explore whether clients have any preferences or conditions for home visits.
- Use the extended postnatal support plan to set out agreements via audio or video call for the support you will provide. Complete this before negotiating any home visits.
- Birth for Humankind can support with access to information and resources to assist with remote service delivery.
- If undertaking home visits, observe all social distancing recommendations and take protective measures around infection control and hygiene. Always wear a face mask. This may include wearing gloves throughout your visit.
- Do not have physical contact with older children. Consider whether it is really necessary for you to touch the baby.
- Do not visit if you, the client, or members of their household are unwell, or have been exposed to someone who is unwell.
- Ask your client before each meeting if either they or their close contacts have symptoms of, or exposure to, COVID-19.

Why have we made these decisions?

As you will understand, this is an unprecedented time and we are carefully considering the protocols we put in place to best protect our clients, volunteers and community against the transmission of COVID-19, whilst also maintaining critical support to our clients.



Our decisions are based on multiple factors, including:

- Compliance requirements with the Victorian Government Stay at Home Directions². For example:
 - Birth for Humankind is permitted to undertake home visits, under Section 11 (3) (c) and Section 11 (4) (d)³
 - Birth for Humankind is permitted to meet clients in a hospital setting, with the permission of the hospital, under Section 7 (1) (d) and Section 7 (1) (f) of the Directions⁴ document
- Best-practice doula support. We understand that the doula-client relationship benefits from meeting in person. This is why we advise that you may meet your client at the hospital, or near to the hospital in an open space, as long as you, the client and anyone else who is with them respects all social distancing requirements.
- Public health advice on social distancing, use of Personal Protective Equipment and the limited availability of/or current inability to supply Personal Protective Equipment to individuals.

We understand that there is a lot of conflicting advice available. However, our guidance has been carefully considered and must be upheld at all times when acting on behalf of Birth for Humankind.

Additional support for clients

We are closely monitoring the evolving needs of our clients during this time. If your clients have any specific needs or concerns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, please let us know as soon as possible.

We are looking into additional ways we can support clients during this time, for example, by seeking additional funding to provide private transport to appointments for clients.

² See above.

³ See above.

⁴ See above.



Appendix 1: Supporting Resources

The following resources may be of use to you and your clients. However, we encourage you to regularly check your email and Better Impact for the latest updates to resources.

Birth for Humankind's translated information sheets for clients (at Appendix 2 and on request)

Better Health VIC: [General advice and information](#)

Department of Health: [General updates](#)

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecology (UK): [Coronavirus and pregnancy](#)

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: [COVID-19 statement and advice](#)

Victorian Department of Health and Human Services: [Multi-language translated resources on Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

World Health Organisation: [General information and advice](#)



Appendix 2: Birth for Humankind COVID-19 information sheet for clients

