

## BIRTH IN PLACE

### **HOW TO HELP A WOMAN GIVING BIRTH**

Labor is the process where the body prepares for birth. Women prepare for the birth by finding a safe place for birth: a birth center, a hospital, or their home. Wherever women give birth, they plan to have people skilled with health care with them for the birth. Sometimes labor happens so quickly that women aren't at the place they intend to be and need to wait for help. Sometimes in times of emergencies like hurricanes or earthquakes, women can't travel to the birth place.

Anyone can help a woman when the baby is going to be born quickly.

#### *How to help a woman in labor:*

- Encourage the woman and reassure her. If you say calm, the mother will be calmer. Call 911 for emergency help if you are able.
- Find a private, comfortable place for the woman. She might be comfortable walking around. She might be comfortable on hands and knees, rocking back and forth a little. She might be comfortable sitting down or resting on her side. The woman can move around as much as she wants.
- Gather these supplies together for the birth: dry cloths to dry the baby, blankets or some kind of warm covering for the baby, a pad or some kind of absorbent material to place under the mother
- The woman might be thirsty and can drink water or other drinks. If the woman is warm from the work of labor, you can fan her with anything that will move air. You can also find a cloth, wet it and dab her face.
- The woman will breathe heavily as if she's running a marathon. You can help her by asking her to breathe slowly. Coach her to breathe slowly and take deep breaths. Every 2 to 3 minutes, the uterus, the muscle around the baby will squeeze to push the baby down and out. This is called a contraction. The woman will have a concentrated look on her face and might say it hurts. Hold her hand and encourage her during the contractions.
- The fluid around the newborn is called the amniotic fluid or the bag of water. The bag of water might break before the baby is born. The amniotic fluid is usually clear but might be yellow or greenish. Put some towels of something absorbent under the woman to catch the amniotic fluid in case the bag of water breaks. If you have a large plastic garbage bag for under the towels, everything stays drier.
- Help the woman remove any pants or underwear she has on so that there is room for the baby to be born.

#### *How to help when the baby comes:*

- You don't need to do anything special to help the baby be born. The contractions of the uterus and the woman's pushing will move the baby out.

- The baby's head will be born first, then the body. You don't have to do anything special if you see the umbilical cord around the baby's neck. This happens to about 1 in 4 babies. The baby won't strangle on the cord.
- Have dry cloths ready to wipe the baby dry. Toss the wet cloths away from the baby.
- The baby might look a little blue when it's born. That will change when it cries. Put the baby skin to skin with its mother. The baby can rest on its belly on the mother's abdomen or her chest between her breasts.
- Cover the newborn with dry blankets or cloths. The baby's mother will keep it warm if it stays skin to skin.
- If the baby has fluid or mucous oozing from its nose or mouth, gently wipe it away.
- If the baby isn't breathing well or crying, you can rub its back with a dry cloth or flick the soles of its feet. Crying helps the baby breathe deeply and clear amniotic fluid out of its mouth and lungs.

*How to help after the baby is born:*

- Don't tug on the umbilical cord. The contractions will continue until the woman pushes the placenta out. This might take 5 to 30 minutes.
- Babies lose heat easily. Keep the baby covered. Make sure the covering is away from the baby's face so that it can breathe easily.

Babies lose heat in 4 ways: evaporation, conduction, convection and radiation. The table below explains heat loss and how keep the newborn warm.

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| 1. <b>Evaporation</b> -A wet baby loses heat as its skin dries. Evaporating amniotic fluid takes heat with it.  | Dry the baby immediately after birth with a dry cloth. Toss wet cloths away from the baby.   |
| 2. <b>Conduction</b> -A baby placed on a cold surface loses heat to the cold surface.   | Put the baby skin to skin with its mother. Women use a lot of energy during labor and radiate it as heat. That heat warms the newborn. |
| 3. <b>Convection</b> -A baby loses heat in a cold, drafty room. Cold air blowing over the baby takes cools the baby.  | Make the place of birth as warm and draft free as possible for the newborn.  |
| 4. <b>Radiation</b> - A baby loses heat to a colder surrounding room. If you live in a home with a radiator, think about how the radiator loses heat the room making it warm. | Make the place of birth warm for the newborn. The mother radiates heat through her skin to the newborn to keep the newborn warm.       |

*What to do if help doesn't come soon:*

- The new mother might be thirsty or hungry after the birth. She can eat or drink anything she wants.
- When the placenta is out, you can wrap it in another cloth or a bag. You don't have to cut the placenta off the baby. You can tuck it next to the baby. The cord should only be cut with a sterile blade.

*Finally, congratulate yourself! You have helped a woman give birth in place!*