



TITLE

**WATER IMMERSION LABOUR AND BIRTH**

SCOPE

Provincial: Women's and Infant Health

DOCUMENT #

HCS-279

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**NOTE:** The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

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## OBJECTIVES

- To support a consistent, safe, and **patient**-centred care approach for facilitating water immersion labour and birth for patients who request this birthing modality where feasible.

## PRINCIPLES

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is committed to providing high quality care that aligns with patient preferences, desires and best practice.

AHS acknowledges the importance of supporting patients who request water immersion as their preferred method of pain relief for labour and delivery.

AHS will endeavor to facilitate a water immersion labour (first [1st] stage) and birth (second [2nd] and third [3rd] stage), given that the **birth facility** and health care team can safely adhere to the elements outlined in this policy.

The following are guiding principles:

Respect for Informed Decision-Making: Persons have the right to make informed choices and to take responsibility and control for their lives, without blame or punishment, even when certain choices may expose them to risk.

Patient-Centred Care: Care providers should strive to keep the patient's needs and perspectives at the heart of the healthcare encounter, contributing to systems and processes that try to prioritize the needs of the patient.

Limitation on Curtailing of Freedoms: The curtailing of individual freedoms to avoid harm to others should be restricted to those which are proportionate to the expected benefit, reasonable and justifiable.

Collaboration: Stakeholders in a decision, including patients, should, to the extent reasonable and possible, be empowered to participate in the decision-making process and have their legitimate needs and preferences given due regard.

Avoiding Harm: Patients, families, staff and the public should not be exposed to harm where it is unnecessary or reasonably avoidable.

## APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).

## ELEMENTS

### 1. Points of Emphasis

- 1.1 Water immersion during labour refers to having the patient labour in a pool/tub with the delivery taking place out of the water. Water birth refers to completing the final stages of labour and delivery in the pool/tub.
- 1.2 Prior to entering the pool/tub, and throughout all stages of labour, **health care providers** shall confirm with the patient their continued comfort with the birthing plan (water immersion), and discuss alternatives as needed.
- 1.3 Water immersion for labour and/or births are supported within AHS birth facilities when the elements in the following sections are met.

### 2. Patient Eligibility

- 2.1 The patient:
  - a) has requested water immersion for labour and/or birth;
  - b) discussed their choice, applicable information and any supplies needed with their **most responsible health practitioner (MRHP)**;
  - c) met the criteria outlined in the AHS *Water Immersion Labour and Birth* Guideline; and
  - d) provided **informed consent** to participate, in accordance with the AHS *Consent to Treatment/Procedure(s)* Policy Suite.

### 3. Health Care Providers

- 3.1 Health care providers shall have completed appropriate clinical education and are competent to properly support the patient through water immersion labour and delivery.
- a) Clinical education shall address safety, infection prevention and control (IPC), and potential **emergency situations** and safe patient handling.
  - b) The Zone or site may have local training requirements regarding water immersion.
- 3.2 A **health care professional** with the appropriate training (see Section 3.1 above) shall provide care throughout all stages of labour and birth.
- a) The MRHP shall be present during the final stages of the second (2nd) stage and until completion of the third (3rd) stage of labour.

### 4. Environment

- 4.1 Location for the pool/tub set up meets the physical and structural requirements outlined in the AHS *Water Immersion Labour and Birth* Guideline.
- 4.2 Equipment requirements, as outlined in the AHS *Water Immersion Labour and Birth* Guideline, are met.
- 4.3 Appropriate planning has occurred within the birth facility regarding water immersion labour and birth processes, expectations, equipment and **environmental safeguards**. This includes engaging a multi-disciplinary health care team to support collaborative care.

### 5. Safety

- 5.1 Health care provider roles and responsibilities supporting water immersion labour and birth needs to be clear amongst the health care team.
- a) Patient and newborn condition needs to be communicated amongst the health care team throughout labour and delivery.
- 5.2 Patient and health care provider safety, emergency situation and infection prevention and control processes shall be followed as outlined in the AHS *Water Immersion Labour and Birth* Guideline.

## DEFINITIONS

**Birth facility** means the Alberta Health Services hospital where an infant is born.

**Emergency situation** means a circumstance which requires immediate health care that is necessary to preserve life, to prevent serious physical or mental harm, or to alleviate severe pain.

**Environmental safeguards** means the presence, absence or structure of physical features to prevent patients, visitors or staff from being harmed, engaging in self-injurious behavior, and/or harming others.

**Health care professional** means an individual who is a member of a regulated health discipline, as defined by the *Health Disciplines Act* (Alberta) or the *Health Professions Act* (Alberta), and who practices within scope and role.

**Health care provider** means any person who provides goods or services to a patient, inclusive of health care professionals, staff, students, volunteers and other persons acting on behalf of or in conjunction with Alberta Health Services.

**Informed consent** means the patient's agreement (or alternate decision-maker) to undergo a treatment/procedure after being provided, in a manner the patient can understand, with the relevant information about the nature of the treatment/procedure(s), its benefits, potential risks and alternatives, and the potential consequences of refusal.

**Most responsible health practitioner (MRHP)** means the health practitioner who has responsibility and accountability for the specific treatment/procedure(s) provided to a patient and who is authorized by Alberta Health Services to perform the duties required to fulfill the delivery of such a treatment/procedure(s) within the scope of their practice.

**Patient** means all persons, inclusive of residents and clients, who receive or have requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers. Patient also means, where applicable:

- a) a co-decision-maker with the person; or
- b) an alternate decision-maker on behalf of the person.

## REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
  - *Consent to Treatment/Procedure(s) Policy* (#PRR-01)
  - *Water Immersion Labour and Birth Guideline* (#HCS-279-01)

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