



Australian College of
Midwives

ACM: For midwives. With women. For the future.

POSITION STATEMENT

Use of Water Immersion for Labour and/or Birth

Date of Issue: August 2023

The Australian College of Midwives' Position Statement

Use of Water Immersion for Labour and/or Birth.

The Australian College of Midwives (ACM) is the **national peak professional body for midwives in Australia** and supports continuous improvement of the midwifery profession. ACM supports the choice of women to access water immersion for all stages of labour and birth.

Definitions

Water immersion Refers to the immersion in water by a pregnant woman during any stage of labour where the woman's abdomen is completely submerged. Examples of locations include a bathtub, an inflatable or hard-sided pool or a purpose-built birthing pool in a birthing unit.¹

Water birth Refers to when the newborn is born under the water.¹

Key Principles

- Warm water immersion relieves the intensity of pain associated with labour. Warm water and buoyancy elevate the release of endorphins and facilitate relaxation.²
- There are many benefits to immersion in water for labour and/or birth, including:
 - increased feelings of control and satisfaction
 - reduced use of pharmacological analgesia (including epidural)
 - shortened length of labour
 - reduced rates of augmentation
 - reduced maternal pain
 - reduced rates of postpartum haemorrhage
 - reduced rates of episiotomy and higher likelihood of intact perineum

Considerations for introducing water immersion are:

- There is the potential risk of postpartum uterine infection.
- Specific training is required around infection control and management of obstetric emergencies for women in water.
- There is no evidence to contraindicate water immersion for the third stage of labour.^{3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9}
- There is no significant increase in rates of special care nursery admission or death for babies born in water.

- There is an increased risk of cord avulsion (from 1.3 per 1000 to 4.3 per 1000) though the overall risk is still quite low. When birth is attended by a skilled midwife cord avulsion poses no increased neonatal morbidity.^{1,4,5,9 10, 11}
- Women and/or their baby who are identified as likely to have health considerations requiring additional observation or care should be supported in their decision making to access water immersion in labour and/or birth and may be offered additional monitoring through telemetry if indicated.³
- Midwives have a responsibility to partner with women to provide individualised woman-centred care and to share information and resources to support the woman's informed decision-making and advocate her choices.
- Informed decision-making, informed consent, and right to decline are accepted principles in Australia. Each woman has the right to make informed decisions, including consent or refusal of any aspect of her care. Women must be respected in the choices that they make.
- Women more likely suited to safe water immersion / water birth
 - No factors noted in fetal or maternal wellbeing prior to or during labour that would increase an adverse outcome from labouring and/or birthing in water
 - Term gestation
 - Singleton pregnancy
 - Cephalic presentation
 - Clear liquor
 - Woman's ability and/or suitable support to assist entrance and exit of the pool.
 - Provided with continuous attendance of a midwife competent in warm water immersion.

Achieving Best Practice

To achieve best practice in the use of water immersion for labour and birth, it is necessary for consumers, professional colleges, education providers, health systems, federal government and state and territory governments and policy makers to work together to:

1. Foster a culture of valuing physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual safety in all birth environments;
2. Provide women with unbiased evidence-based information antenatally about water immersion for labour and/or birth and to support informed decision-making;
3. Provide women with equitable access to water immersion in labour and/or birth;

4. Provide adequate training and education required to ensure that midwives are competent and confident to care for women who choose water immersion and/or birth;
5. Ensure that midwives work to their full scope of practice;
6. Develop evidence-based policies and guidelines;
7. Consider adoption of “Aqua Apgars” for babies born in water⁶;
8. Undertake more research on immersion in water during labour and birth, particularly for the third stage of labour.

Resources to Guide Practice

The ACM recommends the use of the following resources to guide midwives in their practice:

Australian College of Midwives (2021), *National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral*, 4th edn, ACM, Canberra. www.midwives.org.au

Queensland Clinical Guidelines. Normal birth Guideline No. MN22.25-V5-R27 Queensland Health. 2022. Available from: <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg>

Safer Care Victoria (2021). The use of water during labour and birth. https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIDANCE_Water%20for%20labour%20and%20birth.pdf

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The Australian College of Midwives acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live.

END

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