

Water Births Recommendations

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Best practice recommendations

Purpose

To outline the IPC principles, IPC clinical contraindication criteria and equipment care and handling measures to reduce the risk of cross-contamination and transmission of infection during water births.

Applicability

This guideline should be followed by all Alberta Health Services (AHS) staff, medical staff, volunteers, students and other persons acting on behalf of AHS (including contracted service providers as necessary).

Recommendations

1. IPC routine practices

- 1.1 Use [Routine Practices](#) including [hand hygiene](#) throughout the water birth to prevent cross-contamination or infection.
 - 1.1.1 Do not perform aseptic procedures under water, e.g., injections.
 - 1.1.2 **Personal protective equipment (PPE)** for healthcare workers assisting with labour and delivery includes a surgical or procedure mask and eye protection as indicated by [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#) to prevent the risk of exposure to blood and body fluids within two metres of the perineum:
 - a) from the time of active pushing and perineal exposure and until;
 - b) the baby is born and placenta is delivered; and/or
 - c) any required perineal repair is completed; and
 - d) if providing care at or within two metres of the perineum before and after delivery for up to six weeks postpartum, which may according to clinical judgement, require an extended period of time and thus a prolonged risk of exposure. Refer to the IPC Labour and Delivery Information Sheet: Prevention of Invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease for more information.
 - 1.1.3 PPE for a water birth includes clean **gloves** long enough to prevent exposure to potentially contaminated water, waterproof gown and facial/eye protection (goggles and mask, or a face shield). Further information on donning and doffing of PPE is available from <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/6422.asp>.
 - 1.1.4 Single-use pools and accessories, e.g., pool liners, debris net, fill hose, drain hose, are preferred. Discard single-use medical devices after use.
 - 1.1.5 Clean and **disinfect** reusable equipment, e.g., pools and accessories, after use according to

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the manufacturer's instructions.

- Use disinfectants provided by AHS or confirm disinfectant has a Health Canada Drug Identification Number (DIN).
- Fill and drain hoses are clearly labelled and or disposed of if not reusable. Drain hoses cannot be used to for filling.
- Allow to air-dry between each use.

1.1.6 Inspect and maintain pools according to manufacturer's guidelines.

1.1.7 Remove damaged pools and accessories from service.

1.1.8 Store clean pools and accessories in a designated clean, dry, area protected from dust, moisture and temperature extremes.

2. IPC clinical contraindications

2.1 Water births are contraindicated if the mother has:

- blood borne infection, e.g., Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV;
- active Herpes infection (Herpes simplex, Herpes zoster);
- symptoms of gastrointestinal (GI) illness within the previous 48 hours;
- open cut or skin lesions;
- premature rupture of membranes if combined with other complications, e.g., labour augmentation or presence of active infection.

2.2 No one else should enter the pool if they are known to have: a blood borne infection, active Herpes infection, and symptoms of GI illness within the previous 48 hours, or an open cut or skin lesions.

3. Type of water birth pool/tub components

3.1 If reusable pools and accessories are used select those:

- a) Designed and manufactured for the purpose of water immersion during labor.
- b) Used with liners.
- c) With manufacturer's cleaning and disinfection instructions.
- d) With a pipe-less (non-jetted tubs) system.

3.2 Do not use pools for water immersion that have water recirculation components or heaters, or jets.

4. Water

Infection can be spread from using water from a contaminated water source. Bacteria such as *Legionella* and *Pseudomonas* can grow in water sitting for extended periods of time.

4.1 Use clean, potable tap water

4.2 Fill the pool as close as possible to time of use (< 6 hours)

4.3 Keep the water clean

- a) Remove stool and blood clots from the pool immediately with a disposable debris net. Drain, clean and refill the pool as soon as possible, if contaminants cannot be easily removed.

Definitions

Disinfection means the inactivation of disease-producing microorganisms. Disinfection does not destroy bacterial spores. Medical equipment/devices must be cleaned thoroughly before effective disinfection can take place.

Gloves mean non-sterile gloves used by the healthcare worker as personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce the risk of exposure to blood and body fluids. Gloves must be changed between patients and between contaminated and clean procedures with the same patient.

Low-Level Disinfection means the level of disinfection required when processing noncritical equipment/devices or some environmental surfaces. Low-level disinfectants kill most vegetative bacteria and some fungi as well as enveloped (lipid) viruses. Low-level disinfectants do not kill mycobacteria or bacterial spores.

Personal Protective Equipment means clothing, gloves, masks, face goggles, and splash shields which can be used by a healthcare worker to provide a barrier against potentially infectious microorganisms.

Water Birth means the immersion in water by a pregnant woman during any stage of labour, often for relaxation and pain relief, where the woman's abdomen is completely submerged. This implies the use of a receptacle such as a pool, tub or bath which is larger than a normal bathtub. The period of immersion may be for one or more stages of labour and for any duration.

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