

Prenatal Education in Ontario

A Parent's and Provider's Perspective



In 2016 Best Start Resource Centre consulted Ontario-based women and their partners who were either pregnant, new parents or trying to conceive, in order to learn about their needs and preferences related to prenatal education. In addition, Ontario organizations that provided prenatal education were consulted in 2014 to ascertain what they hoped to provide to expectant families. Unless otherwise stated, information in this fact sheet summarizes the results of these surveys.

Preparing for Pregnancy and a New Baby

Women reported that they relied on a variety of information sources to learn about pregnancy, labour and newborn care. The top sources of information included:

- Friends, family and colleagues
- Websites
- Health care providers
- Books, magazines and other printed materials
- Prenatal education program (in-person or online)
- Apps for expectant couples

Provision of Prenatal Education in Ontario

About half of new mothers (52%) indicated that they learned about pregnancy, labour and newborn care through a prenatal course. While 50% of pregnant women perceived in person prenatal education classes to be a trustworthy source of information, only 32% believed online prenatal classes were trustworthy.

Educators reported providing prenatal education in a variety of formats, including:

- Formal face-to-face group sessions
- Drop-in face-to-face group sessions
- Online programs
- One-one-one education



Women reported choosing specific types of prenatal education classes for a variety of reasons. The top reasons included:

- The desire to be in a group setting in order to meet other parents
- Could do the program whenever they wanted
- Recommendation by a health care provider
- Recommendation by family or friends
- Liked selecting what they want to learn about

Women who participated in prenatal education classes indicated that they experienced many benefits. The most commonly reported benefits included:

- Feeling more prepared for labour and birth
- Feeling more confident in their ability to have and care for a baby
- Feeling more prepared for newborn care
- Feeling more prepared for their new family life
- Receiving support with breastfeeding

Most new mothers (89%) who took prenatal courses found them to be useful and 35% of women who didn't participate later regretted their decision.



Why Some Women Don't Attend Prenatal Education Classes

Women and prenatal education providers were largely found to agree on the top reasons for low prenatal class attendance in Ontario.

Prenatal education providers believed that the top reasons for women not attending prenatal education classes included:

- The availability of other sources of information
- A lack of transportation to attend programs
- A lack of awareness about existing programs
- A preference for individual education
- Programs being offered at times that were inconvenient
- Language barriers
- Programs that were too expensive for some potential participants

According to women, the top reasons for not participating in prenatal education classes included:

- The availability of other sources of information
- A lack of time to attend programs
- Programs that were too expensive for some potential participants
- A lack of awareness about existing programs
- A preference for individual education
- Inconvenient program timing/schedules

Increasing the Uptake of Prenatal Education

Women and prenatal education providers provided suggestions for improving prenatal education and increasing class attendance.

The majority of women who received prenatal education did not feel that there were any gaps in program delivery. However, several did identify improvements that could be made, including:

- More flexible hours
- Longer classes/courses
- More diverse choice of topics
- Improved coverage of some topics (such as postpartum recovery and breastfeeding)

Prenatal education providers believed that prenatal education could be improved through a variety of strategies, including:

- Offering programs designed for specific groups (such as teens and Aboriginal groups)
- Offering programs that meet the needs of those with language barriers
- Providing childcare
- Providing transportation
- Reducing the cost of prenatal education or providing subsidies
- Holding classes in accessible locations
- Offering shorter classes
- Offering free online prenatal education
- Teleconferencing for parents in isolated areas



Strengthening Prenatal Education

The level of trust and involvement in prenatal classes is low. About half of the pregnant women identified prenatal classes as a trustworthy source of information. Half of new mothers indicated that they learned about pregnancy, labour and newborn care through a prenatal class. Despite this, those who participated in a prenatal class, indicated that they benefited, and those who didn't, often indicated that they later regretted their decision.

In order to improve participation rates in prenatal education, and to improve the quality of prenatal education, providers can review the provincial information on why women don't participate in prenatal education, what they want from prenatal education, and suggestions to improve prenatal education. They can also consider the populations and services in their community in light of these findings. In addition, service providers all have a role in promoting the benefits of early participation in prenatal education, as well as the options available in their community.

References

- Best Start Resource Centre. (2014). *Prenatal Education Surveys*.
- Best Start Resource Centre. (2016). *Parent Survey (Leger)*.

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