

# GIVING BIRTH IN A NEW LAND

A guide for women new  
to Canada and their families

*best start*  
*meilleur départ*

by/par health **nexus** santé

# A New Baby Will Come Soon



## **You are pregnant. Congratulations!**

This booklet will help you learn more about having a baby in Canada. The way things happen here may be different from the country you came from. This booklet focuses on Ontario.

## **This booklet will help you learn about:**

- How to prepare for the birth of your baby.
- How to find a health care provider.
- How to talk with your health care provider.
- What to expect during childbirth.
- What to expect after your baby is born.
- The kinds of services that may be available to you.

**See page 30 for a list of important services.**

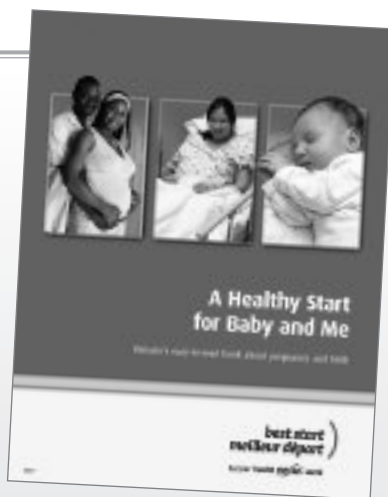


A **health care provider** is a professional health care worker.

As a pregnant woman in Ontario, your health care providers may include:

- doctors
- midwives
- nurse practitioners

The book *A Healthy Start for Baby and Me* will provide you with details on health before pregnancy, health during pregnancy, and healthy childbirth. You may be able to get a copy from your local public health unit or you can download it from [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org).



The medical information in this guide relates to healthy pregnancies. If you have any medical questions or concerns, talk with your health care provider to get advice that applies to your pregnancy.

## Table of Contents

<b>Getting all the help you need</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Finding the health care you need during pregnancy</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Getting ready for your baby</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Having your baby</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Important services during pregnancy and after your baby is born</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>More services</b> .....	<b>32</b>

# Getting all the help you need



You may need help during your pregnancy and after your baby is born. In your home country, your family and friends may have helped.

Although you may not have as many family and friends in Canada, there are many other ways to get the help you need.

## **Your partner**

If you have a husband or partner, they can help you during pregnancy and they can help care for your baby. This is even more important if you do not have other family here to help you. It is good for them to be aware of services for pregnant women in case you or your baby needs to use these services (see **Important Services** on page 30). They can also learn to take care of the baby to give you a rest. This will help them know the baby.

There are many ways partners and fathers can help with the baby. These include changing diapers, holding the baby and playing with the baby. They can also help you by cooking meals, shopping for groceries or doing housework. Before the baby is born, you can discuss what each of you will do to care for your baby.

## Other people in your life

- It is good to have many people who can help you after the baby is born. You may have family members who live nearby and this will be helpful.
- If you do not know many people in your area, try to meet some while you are pregnant. There are many cultural groups, especially in large cities. For a list of cultural organizations, contact the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants ([www.ocasi.org](http://www.ocasi.org)), 416-322-4950.
- Programs in Ontario include the **Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program**, the **Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program** and the **Ontario Early Years Centres**. The people who work at these programs can help you find the services you need in your area. To find out about these programs, contact your local public health unit and ask to speak to a nurse.
- It is very useful to make friends with people who have lived in Canada for a long time. They can help you understand the local practices better. You can meet other parents and pregnant women at drop-in programs.
- Most hospitals have a social worker who can help you find services in your area. Your health care provider can refer you to this person.
- Ask for help when you need it, even if you just want to talk to someone. **You are not alone!**



## Public Health Units

All areas of Ontario are serviced by a Public Health Unit. They provide many programs and services to help women and their families have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. To find the Public Health Unit in your area, visit [apps.publichealthontario.ca/PHULocator/](https://apps.publichealthontario.ca/PHULocator/) and type in your postal code or city. You can also call the **INFOline** at 1-866-532-3161.

## What about language?

If you do not speak English or French, you may find it hard to use some of the services available.

- Interpreters are on hand at some places, such as large hospitals. Sometimes this service is free. Ask if they provide this service and if there is a cost.
- If there are no interpreters that work in your language, you may choose to go to your appointments with a friend or a family member you feel comfortable with. They can help you talk with your health care provider.
- If you have a medical problem or are sick, you can call **Telehealth Ontario** (1-866-797-0000) and ask for an interpreter to help you talk to a nurse. You do not need an Ontario Health Card or insurance to use this service. It is free.
- Most settlement agencies provide help with interpretation. To learn more and to find local contacts, see [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org), under “Education.”



# Finding the health care you need during pregnancy

It is important to visit a health care provider as soon as you think you are pregnant. This may be different from the way things are done in your home country.

## Finding health services

The health care providers who help pregnant women in Ontario include:

- A family doctor, who provides health care when you are pregnant and helps you deliver the baby.
- A family doctor, who provides health care when you are pregnant and then may refer you to an obstetrician who will help you deliver the baby.
- A nurse practitioner who provides you with care when you are pregnant. Towards the end of your pregnancy, she will refer you to an obstetrician, a family doctor, or a midwife.
- A midwife, who provides health care when you are pregnant, helps you deliver the baby, and cares for you until the baby is 6 weeks old. In Ontario, midwives are registered health care professionals and have graduated from a university midwifery program. You do NOT need a doctor to refer you to a midwife; you can call one yourself.

It may be very hard to find a health care provider in Ontario. In some areas, there is a shortage. That is why it is important to start to find one as soon as you know you are pregnant (or even before!).

Here are some tips on how to find a health care provider:

- Ask friends, family, and your local public health unit if they know a health care provider who accepts new patients.
- Look in the Yellow Pages of your local phone book. Search for **Physicians & Surgeons**. Be aware that you will need a referral from a family doctor to see a specialist such as an obstetrician or gynaecologist.

- Register with Health Care Connect ([www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/healthcareconnect/public](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/healthcareconnect/public)), or call 1-800-445-1822. This service helps people in Ontario find a local doctor or nurse practitioner who accepts new patients.
- Use the Doctor Search service ([www.cpsso.on.ca/docsearch](http://www.cpsso.on.ca/docsearch)) of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to locate a doctor in your area.
- Call your local hospital for a list of doctors who will accept new patients. For a list of Ontario hospitals visit: [www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/hosp/hosploc\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/hosp/hosploc_mn.html) or you can look in the Yellow Pages of your telephone book under **Hospitals**.
- Your local settlement agency may have a list of doctors who will accept new patients or who speak your language.
- You may want to use a walk-in medical clinic. Many hospitals have walk-in clinics for non-emergency health issues. You may not be able to see the same doctor each time you go to this kind of clinic. To find a walk-in clinic, look under **Clinics-Medical** in the Yellow Pages of the phone book.
- You can find a midwife in your area by contacting the Association of Ontario Midwives at [www.aom.on.ca](http://www.aom.on.ca), 1-866-418-3773.

## Ontario Health Insurance Program = OHIP



For information on the health insurance program for Ontario, visit [www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ohip/](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ohip/) or call the **ServiceOntario**, Infoline at 1-866-532-3161



## **Paying for health services**

You can receive medical services after you arrive in Ontario but the services are not always free.

During your first 3 months in Ontario, you are NOT covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

It is best to get private health coverage BEFORE you arrive in Ontario. Once you are in Ontario, if you plan to purchase private health coverage, you must do it during the first 5 days after you arrive and pay for it.

- If you do not have private health insurance during the first 3 months, you must expect to pay for any services you need.
- Details about this are available at [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org).

### **If you are a refugee**

Before your OHIP coverage begins, you can get emergency and essential health services through the Interim Federal Health Program ([www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/interim\\_health.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/interim_health.shtml)), or call 1-888-242-2100.

### **More details about health costs**

- 1) It is possible to receive some health care services without OHIP coverage at community health centres ([www.aohc.org](http://www.aohc.org)) and through midwives ([www.aom.on.ca](http://www.aom.on.ca)). Many services such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children and Infant Hearing are also free.
- 2) If you need to take an ambulance to a hospital, your Ontario Health Card will pay for most of the cost but you will need to pay part of the fee. If the doctor who sees you at the hospital does not think that you truly needed to take an ambulance or if you do not have health coverage, you will have to pay the full cost. This can be very expensive.
- 3) If you have to pay for health care, find out if your health care provider or hospital will agree to a payment plan, such as paying some of the total each month, instead of all at once. Discuss these plans with your health care provider while you are pregnant.

## When prenatal visits and tests will happen

Make an appointment with your health care provider as soon as you think you are pregnant.

Your first visit will likely last a little longer than the ones that follow. During the first visit:

- You will be asked about your medical history.
- Your health care provider will suggest you have urine and blood tests. These tests are very useful to prevent health problems but you can decide to have these tests or not.
- Your health care provider will do a physical exam, and may do an internal examination at this point.

After this first visit, the usual timing for future visits is:

Number of weeks of pregnancy	How often will you see your health care provider?
0 to 28 weeks	Every four weeks
29 to 36 weeks	Every two weeks
After 36 weeks	Every week

Your health care provider may offer you these tests:

Number of weeks of pregnancy	Name and description of test
Around 18 weeks...	If you agree, an ultrasound test will be done in a hospital or clinic. The purpose of the ultrasound test is to help confirm the baby's due date and to check the baby's growth and development.
At 24 to 28 weeks...	A blood test to look for diabetes caused by pregnancy (gestational diabetes) will be done, if you agree.
Your health care provider may offer you other tests depending on the results of the ultrasound, your health, your age, your medical history, etc. Make sure you understand the purpose of each test. You are free to decide whether or not to have these tests done.	

## Know Your Rights

In Ontario, it is against the law for an employer to treat a woman differently because she is pregnant, has had a baby, is breastfeeding or may become pregnant. It is also against the law to fire a woman from her job, demote her, or lay her off because she is pregnant.

If you have special needs when you are pregnant, such as going to medical appointments or problems doing your job, discuss these with your employer. For more information, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission website at [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca) or phone 1-800-387-9080.

## Canada does not allow abuse

In Canada, emotional and physical abuse are against the law. Many groups can help people who are being abused. Abuse can take different forms: verbal, sexual, physical, etc. Your health care provider can help you find the help that you need.

A woman who has permanent resident status cannot lose that status or be forced to leave Canada because she leaves a relationship where there was abuse.

This is true even if her abusive partner is her sponsor. For information, you can

download the the fact sheet ***You and your baby*** (in 10 languages) at [www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence](http://www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence). Or call the Assaulted Women's Helpline 1-866-863-0511. It offers a confidential and free counseling service in 150 languages.





### *Neighbours, Friends & Families*

Neighbours, Friends and Families is a website that describes the signs of woman abuse so that people who care about her can help. It also provides information so those close to a man who needs help changing his behaviour, can help.

Visit: [www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca](http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca).

### **Tips on talking to health care providers**

- Before each visit, write down any questions you have. If you do not speak English well, ask for an interpreter to go with you, especially for your first appointment. If that is not possible, have someone help you translate your written questions.
- Try to learn some important words that you will need during pregnancy, childbirth, and once the baby is born. Your local public health unit may have pamphlets and books on these topics to help you learn the key words.
- Health care providers should explain any treatment or procedure they feel you need or suggest you have. You need to make sure you understand the explanation. You have the right to accept or refuse treatment. You can consult with family members or friends, but you are the person who will decide what to do. Don't be afraid to ask as many questions as you like.



## What to expect

Your health care provider will probably ask you questions like these, especially at your first visit:

- How are you feeling?
- What was the date your last menstrual period started?
- What are you eating and drinking? How hungry are you?
- What type of work are you doing? What other activities do you often do?
- Where do you live? Who lives with you?
- What is your medical history: Have you been pregnant before? Do you have physical or mental health issues? Are you taking any medication? What immunizations (vaccines) have you received?
- Do you have any family history of physical or mental illness?
- Are you coping with a lot of stress?
- Are you in a situation where someone is hurting you or you do not feel safe?
- What can you tell me about your pregnancies and childbirth in the past?

Make sure you give honest answers to all the questions. You can choose to talk to your health care provider alone if you prefer.

- You may want to have a female health care provider, such as a midwife. If one is not available, you may need to receive health care from a man.
- You can ask to have your husband, partner or a family member with you when you have a physical examination and during childbirth. You can also ask to be alone with your health care provider at any time. If you are having difficulty meeting your health care provider alone, contact the office before your visit and mention it so they can help you.

- In Canada, birth plans are often done by parents, to explain in writing their preferences to the people who will help them deliver the baby. It is always best to have a birth plan written in English and to give your health care provider a copy during your pregnancy. Take it with you to the hospital. Your birth plan can include:
  - What you prefer on subjects such as help with starting labour, pain relief, birthing positions, and medical procedures.
  - Who will make decisions for you if you are not able to do so during labour.
  - Your cultural or religious preferences, such as circumcision of your baby son or saying what the sex of the child is.
  - Other items that may be important to you.

Do not assume that things in Canada will be the same as your home country. Your hospital may have staff to help with cultural preferences. The health care provider or hospital may not be able to do everything you want, but will try.

## How to talk to your doctor

This website page from HealthyOntario.com explains how to prepare for a visit to the doctor and how to communicate when you are there.



[www.healthyontario.com/FeatureDetails.aspx?feature\\_id=3988](http://www.healthyontario.com/FeatureDetails.aspx?feature_id=3988)

## Writing your birth plan

Some websites provide sample birth plans. They can give you ideas about what you may want to include in your own birth plan. Make sure your plan reflects your wishes. Discuss it with the person who will attend the birth with you and with your health care provider.



To learn more about how to write a birth plan, visit the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's website at: [www.sogc.org/health/pregnancy-birth-plan\\_e.asp](http://www.sogc.org/health/pregnancy-birth-plan_e.asp).

### Important Signs to Watch For If You are Pregnant

- Bad cramps or stomach pains that don't go away
- Spotting or bleeding from your vagina
- Trickle or gush of fluid from your vagina
- Lower back pain/pressure, or change in lower backache
- A feeling that the baby is pushing down
- Contractions, or change in the strength or number of them
- An increase in the amount of vaginal discharge
- Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or bad headaches
- Blurred vision or spots before your eyes
- Sudden or severe swelling of your feet, hands or face
- A decrease in your baby's movement
- Being in a motor vehicle (i.e., car) accident

Go to the hospital right away and contact your doctor/midwife if you have any of these symptoms!

# Getting ready for the baby

## Prenatal classes

Prenatal classes are generally offered:

- to women and men having their first baby; and
- to people giving birth in Canada for the first time.

They are offered in most parts of Ontario.

The program topics may vary from place to place. Most of the time, the topics include healthy eating, exercise during pregnancy, signs of problems, the stages of labour, pain control, childbirth, breastfeeding, and learning to be a parent.

- Your health care provider should be able to help you find prenatal classes in your area.
- Classes are sometimes offered by public health units, community health centres, hospitals, or community colleges.
- Ask what the cost will be to attend the classes. Some are free, some are low cost, and some are more expensive. Some do not charge pregnant women who have very low incomes.

## Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby

This booklet provides information about healthy eating for pregnant women. You can get it from your local public health unit or you may download it from [www.beststart.org/resources/nutrition](http://www.beststart.org/resources/nutrition).

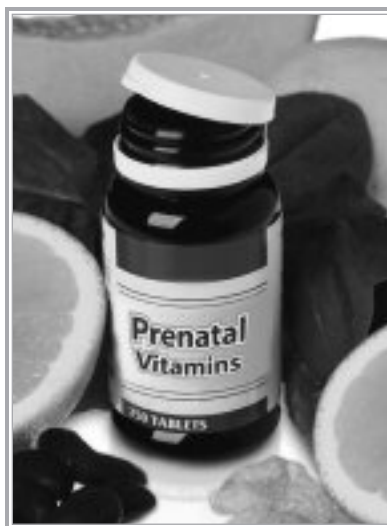




- Husbands or partners are encouraged to attend prenatal classes. A family member such as your mother, sister, or friend may also attend classes with you. It is best if the person who will be with you during childbirth attends prenatal classes with you.

### **Nutrition and supplements**

- It is important to eat well before, during, and after your pregnancy. Try to eat a variety of healthy foods. **Canada's Food Guide** can help you learn about healthy eating. It is available in many languages at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/order-commander/guide\\_trans-trad-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/order-commander/guide_trans-trad-eng.php), or by calling 1-866-225-0709.



- You should also take a prenatal vitamin that contains folic acid. It is possible to buy vitamins that are Halal and Kosher. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider.
- If you cannot afford to buy the food you need, you may go to a Food Bank. For a list of Food Banks in Ontario, go to [www.oafb.ca](http://www.oafb.ca) and select “Find a Food Bank.” You can also call 1-866-220-4022.
- Milk and alternatives will give you and your baby strong bones and teeth. They are important for good nutrition. If you do not like to drink milk, you can eat yogurt and cheese, kefir, chocolate milk, puddings, cream soups, fortified soy beverages, or orange juice with added calcium. Eating fish with the bones such as canned salmon and sardines or making soup stock from fish bones are other ways to get the calcium your baby needs.



- Fish is very healthy. It may be a food that you eat a lot, depending on your culture. Continue to eat fish while you are pregnant, but limit the amount of fish that contains high levels of mercury. For more information, download the brochure **A Guide to Eating Fish for Women, Children and Families** from Toronto Public Health at [www.toronto.ca/health/fishandmercury/pdf/guide\\_eat\\_fish.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/health/fishandmercury/pdf/guide_eat_fish.pdf).
- There are certain foods you should avoid during pregnancy, especially those that may contain bacteria and parasites. Do not eat raw fish and seafood, meat that is not fully cooked, raw or undercooked eggs, unpasteurized milk products, unpasteurized juices, and raw sprouts.
- You may know of traditional medicines, herbs, and teas that are used by pregnant women in your culture. Even if these are natural, talk to your health care provider about them, to make sure they will not harm you or your baby. You can also call **Motherisk** at 1-877-327-4636. This service is free.
- To keep your baby safe, drink less than one or two cups of coffee per day. Remember that tea, chocolate, energy drinks, and many sodas also have caffeine, so your intake should be limited.

- The Canadian government has **Prenatal Nutrition Programs** to help women buy healthy foods and get prenatal vitamins. The people who work in these programs can also help you learn to cook local foods. You can find a program near you by phoning your local public health unit. It is also a good way to meet other pregnant women who live near you. See page 3 on finding your public health unit.
- Women who receive social assistance and are pregnant or breastfeeding may be able to receive a supplement through Ontario Works. Information is available at [www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcscs/social/directives/ow/0605.pdf](http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcscs/social/directives/ow/0605.pdf) or by calling Service Ontario at 1-800-267-8097.

### Physical activity

- Pregnant women are encouraged to be active. A daily walk can be good for you and your baby. Talk to your health care provider about the types of activities that are safe and healthy for you.
- It is sometimes very cold in the winter in Canada. If you dress warmly, you will feel comfortable outside and the cold will not seem so harsh.
- Many shopping malls are a good place to walk indoors. Sometimes, people set up walking groups inside the malls. This is a good way to meet new people.
- When you are pregnant, you should not get too hot when you exercise. Do not go into hot tubs or saunas.
- Some exercise classes are just for pregnant women. Ask about prenatal exercise classes at your community recreation centre.
- If you have questions, call the **Exercise & Pregnancy Helpline** at 1-866-937-7678.



## Environmental issues

- Tell your health care provider about the type of work that you do, to make sure it is safe in pregnancy. In Canada, you cannot lose your job just because you are pregnant.
- Cat feces may contain dangerous parasites. You should not touch cat litter when you are pregnant. Have someone else empty the litter box. Use gloves when you are working in the garden in case there are animal feces in the dirt.
- To learn more about workplace risks for pregnant women, contact the **Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers** ([www.ohcow.on.ca](http://www.ohcow.on.ca)), 1-877-817-0336. Contact **Motherisk** if you have questions about products you are exposed to during pregnancy such as chemicals or pesticides ([www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)), 1-877-327-4636. This service is free.

## Exposure to alcohol, drugs, and tobacco

- Women should not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs when they are pregnant, such as marijuana, cocaine, etc. They can harm the brain of the growing baby.
- Tobacco smoke is harmful to the baby's development. It is better not to smoke and to avoid being in places where other people smoke. In Ontario, it is now illegal to smoke in a car if children under age 16 are also in the car.

### Work & Pregnancy Do Mix

This brochure contains general information on working during pregnancy. You can get a copy from your local public health unit or download it from [www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc\\_health](http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc_health).



## Playing it Safe: Childproofing for Environmental Health

This brochure contains information to help you make your home safer. You can get a copy from your local public health unit or download it from [www.beststart.org/resources/env\\_action](http://www.beststart.org/resources/env_action)



- Talk to your health care provider about any medication before you take it. This includes herbal or natural medicines. Some may not be good for your growing baby.
- If you need to buy medicine from the shelves in a drug store (over-the-counter medicine), first ask the pharmacist if it is okay for pregnant women to use this medicine.
- Your health care provider should be aware of **any medication** you are taking.
- If you are having trouble not taking alcohol, drugs, or tobacco, talk to your health care provider who may be able to help you. In Canada, all health care providers and pharmacists are required to keep personal information private. You can also call **Motherisk** for answers to your questions about drug and alcohol safety, at 1-877-327-4636.





### **Planning for the baby's birth**

While you are pregnant, there are many things you can do to plan for the birth of your baby:

- Think of how you can get to the hospital quickly when you go into labour. Plan for at least two people who can help you get there. If you are planning to use a taxi, make sure you have cash to pay for it.
- If necessary, you can go to the hospital by ambulance but you may need to pay for that service (see section **Paying for Health Services** on page 7).
- If you have other children at home, make plans about who will care for them while you are in the hospital. You cannot bring your children to the hospital when you deliver the baby. Make sure you have at least two people who can take care of your children when you go into labour. If you do not have someone who can care for your children during this time, talk to your health care provider in advance. If you have pets at home, make sure someone can look after them.
- Decide who will be your labour support person. It can be your husband, partner, your mother, a relative, or a friend. You can also hire a doula, who can provide comfort to you during labour. Choose someone that you trust and who can help you make good decisions along the way.

- Write your birth plan and discuss it with your health care provider before the time comes to go to the hospital. Make sure your support person also knows your wishes and agrees to help you with your choices.
- In Canada, circumcision is not usually done for newborn boys. If you want it done for your baby, talk to your health care provider. You can learn more about this subject at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca/pregnancy&babies/circumcision.htm](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/pregnancy&babies/circumcision.htm).
- It is important to consider the benefits of breastfeeding while you are pregnant. Ask your health care provider any questions you may have. Discuss what you prefer with your family and friends. Breastfeeding is commonly done in Canada and it is a mother's right to breastfeed in public. Breast milk is the best food you can give your baby and it is free.

## Is Your Child Safe?

You can download this brochure on safe products for babies and children from [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/alt\\_formats/hecs-sesc/pdf/pubs/cons/child-enfant/child-enfant-eng.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/alt_formats/hecs-sesc/pdf/pubs/cons/child-enfant/child-enfant-eng.pdf) or call the Product Safety Office at 1-866-662-0666.



## Equipment for your baby

Some baby care equipment is necessary and some is just nice to have. The safety of your baby is the most important thing to think about when you buy any equipment.

- You may want to buy used equipment. Make sure it meets all the current safety standards. Health Canada has a website that explains how to choose baby and child care equipment ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/child-enfant/equip](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/child-enfant/equip)).

- In many parts of the province, there are groups that lend child care equipment or sell it at a low cost. Your public health unit may be able to help you find these groups. Your Ontario Early Years Centre may also have access to this equipment.
- When you leave the hospital, you will need to have a car seat for your baby, even if you do not own a car. Your car seat should have a Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (CMVSS) sticker and cannot be older than 10 years. If you find it difficult to put the car seat safely into your vehicle, contact your local public health unit.
- For the first 6 months, the safest way for your baby to sleep is on his back, in a crib in your room. The crib must meet safety standards and should not have pillows, bumper pads, stuffed toys, or blankets. Any of these could cover the baby's face and prevent him from breathing. Cribs made before September 1986 do not meet current safety rules and should NOT be used.
- The **Canadian Paediatric Society's** website for parents has good information on keeping babies safe. Visit: [www.caringforkids.cps.ca/keepkidssafe/KeepBabySafe.htm](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/keepkidssafe/KeepBabySafe.htm).
- **Safe Kids Canada**  
Online resources in multiple languages about child safety. Call 1-888-723-3847 if you have a question about child safety. [www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca)

## Smartlove Website

Visit the website "Smartlove" to find out what types of car seat are required in Ontario for babies and children ([www.ontario.ca/smartlove](http://www.ontario.ca/smartlove)). Explanation on safe installation is also provided.







## Having Your Baby

### **The most common options**

- You can choose to have your baby in a hospital, with a doctor or a midwife.
- You can choose to have your baby in your home, with a midwife.

You can give birth at home if you have a healthy pregnancy and your health care provider does not expect any problems during childbirth.

Both doctors and midwives are covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). You may also be able to receive free services from a midwife if you are not covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

### **Learning about your hospital**

If you are planning to give birth in a hospital, call to find out if you and your support person can do a hospital tour. Sometimes, these tours are arranged through prenatal classes.



Hospital tours are very useful. You will have a chance to learn the way things happen and the rules at your local hospital. It will also give you a chance to ask questions about what you prefer when it comes to language, cultural, or religious practices.

In many hospitals, it is better to pre-register before you arrive to deliver your baby.

Call your hospital, or ask your health care provider to find out what is normal at your hospital.

- In some cases, pre-registration is done at the same time as the hospital tour.
- In other hospitals, you can simply arrive when you begin labour.
- You will need to show your medical insurance card (OHIP or private) and identification.
- You will need to sign consent forms. Make sure you understand what you are signing.
- If you do not understand, ask for an interpreter.

### **What to expect before and during labour at a hospital**

- Prepare a small suitcase before your due date. Remember to include your medical insurance card. A sample list of things to bring is available at [www.hospitalbag.org/print-hospital-bag-checklist.pdf](http://www.hospitalbag.org/print-hospital-bag-checklist.pdf).
- In most hospitals, you can have one or two people with you during labour. You need to check the rules that apply at your hospital. Your husband or partner can attend the birth but does not have to.

- You may have cultural preferences such as being covered during birth, having only female staff helping you, having the father announce the sex of the baby, etc. Make sure to tell your health care provider what you prefer before you begin labour. **Write it in your birth plan and say it again when you go to the hospital.** The hospital may not be able to provide you with all that you prefer, but will try to. You need to be flexible because events may change during labour. You may need to have a caesarean section (an operation to remove the baby, also called a “c-section”). The health of the mother and baby is always the most important concern.
- Once your baby is born, the umbilical cord will be cut. The hospital staff will make sure your baby is breathing properly and will do some tests to make sure the baby is healthy. You will then have your baby in your arms.
- You may ask for your baby to be undressed, for skin-to-skin contact. This is a good way to bond with your baby and helps your baby to learn to breastfeed. Talk to your baby and start breastfeeding him during the first hour. During that time, the hospital staff will make sure your health is good.

### **What to expect after childbirth in a hospital**

- In Canada, while you are in the hospital, **you will be encouraged to take care of your baby.** Try to learn as much as possible from the hospital staff. Your partner and anyone who will help you at home can also learn about feeding and caring for the baby. This will be helpful to you, too, when you go home!
- The hospital staff may teach you how to give your baby a bath, how to handle your baby safely, and how to make sure your baby is comfortable. Try to bathe your baby yourself at least once while you are in the hospital.
- You can have visitors in the hospital. Each hospital has its own rules. In most cases, the husband or partner can visit as much as needed. Other visitors can only come at certain hours of the day and most hospitals only allow two of them at the same time. It may be possible for your own children to visit you, but not other people’s children, depending on the hospital. Find out what the rules are when you do the hospital tour.

- You will receive all the meals you need in the hospital. If you cannot eat some foods because you have allergies or cultural preferences, make sure you let the staff know when you first check into the hospital. Family and friends may be allowed to bring in some of your favourite foods.
- You will be encouraged to have a shower during your time in hospital. This will help prevent illness for you and your baby. This may be different from how things are done in your own country but be aware that the water is very safe and clean in Canada.
- More tests may be done on you and on your baby after the birth. These include blood tests and a hearing test for the baby. This is normal and will help find health problems before you go home. You may also be asked if you wish to have a visit by a Public Health Nurse after you go home. This service is free as part of the **Healthy Babies Healthy Children** program in Ontario and you do not need a OHIP card.
- Most women and their babies stay in the hospital only one or two days after the baby is born. If there are health problems, you or your baby may need to stay longer, for example, if your baby is born very early.

### **Forms to fill out**

- Staff at the hospital or your midwife will provide you with a form for Newborn Registration from Service Ontario. It is important to register your baby's birth in Ontario. By doing so, your baby will have a birth certificate which will be used throughout life to obtain health care, a passport, and many other services. If you need help to fill out these forms, ask your nurse for help. You can also apply on-line at <https://www.orgforms.gov.on.ca>.
- The hospital will ask you to fill out forms so your baby will receive a Health Card from OHIP. If you are covered by OHIP, your baby will also receive coverage. If your coverage is short-term (for example, if you are on a work permit), your baby will be covered for the same length of time as you are. If your situation is different or you need more information, call Service Ontario's INFOLine at 1-866-532-3161.



## **Breastfeeding**

- Breastfeed your baby shortly after birth. The first milk that you produce is called colostrum. It contains protein, minerals, and protection from illness that your baby cannot get any other way.
- Breastfeeding may take time to learn. You can get help from the hospital nurses while you are in the hospital or at home from public health nurses. Make sure you know how to tell if your baby is breastfeeding well. If you or your baby are having any problems, or if breastfeeding is uncomfortable, get help early.
- It is not a good idea to give formula to your baby as it may cause problems with breastfeeding. Also, some babies are confused about how to breastfeed when given rubber nipples and bottles. Breastfeed your baby without giving any other food or drink until your baby is 6 months old. Breast milk is free and just right for your baby. After 6 months, slowly introduce your baby to solid foods. Continue to breastfeed your baby until two years of age and beyond.
- Many programs and groups offer support to breastfeeding mothers in Ontario. Call your public health unit or talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about breastfeeding when you go home. Help on breastfeeding from public health is free.



### **Taking care of yourself and your baby at home**

Giving birth is a normal part of life. In Canada, women are encouraged to do normal activities shortly after giving birth.

- Make sure you get enough rest.
- Eat a variety of foods.
- Do light activities if you are feeling well.
- Going outdoors will be very good for your mental health.

### **Other tips for new mothers**

- Accept help from someone you trust. Almost 4 out of 5 mothers feel sad, irritable, very tired, overwhelmed, have changes in their sleeping or eating patterns. This is called Postpartum Blues or “Baby Blues”. This is normal. It happens in the first few days or weeks after the baby is born. If these feelings last more than two weeks, contact your health care provider. Visit [www.lifewithnewbaby.ca](http://www.lifewithnewbaby.ca) for more information.
- Your health care provider will want to see you and your baby a few days after the birth. At this time, ask questions about baby care, breastfeeding, health, or any other concern you may have. You will also need to see your health care provider when the baby is two months old for immunizations (needles). Your child will need to be immunized to go to school in Ontario.

- Your newborn may cry a lot. It is important to comfort your baby when he needs it. Never shake a baby! Shaking a baby can damage a baby's brain or kill the baby. You should also know that hitting a child is not acceptable in Canada. Your Public Health Nurse can help you find programs to learn about parenting and child discipline.
- It is best to give your body time to rest and rebuild itself between pregnancies. If possible, wait at least two years before you get pregnant again. Discuss this with your partner or husband. Talk to your health care provider about choices that can help to prevent pregnancies.

### **Use the services in your community**

- Women in Ontario have many programs that can help them when they go home with a new baby. Call your public health unit to find out about the programs in your area, such as the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program.
- Home visits are part of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program. This may be available to you, even if you do not have a OHIP card. The Home Visitor will phone you before she comes. The Home Visitor will answer your questions. Write down your questions before the visit.
- The Ontario Early Years Centres are for parents and their children up to age 6. These centres offer many programs where you can meet other parents with young children. You can also find out about other services for parents in these centres.
- You may be eligible for maternity and parental benefits through Employment Insurance if you, or your husband/partner, have been contributing to this plan through work. Information is available through Service Canada (see Important Services next page).

## **Telehealth Ontario**

If you have any questions or concerns about your health or your baby's health when you go home, call your doctor, midwife, or public health unit **RIGHT AWAY**. You can also call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

# Important services during pregnancy and after the baby is born

- **211 Community Information Centres.** In larger centres in Ontario, the phone number 2-1-1 will help you get community, social, health and other government services. There is no charge for using this service. The website [www.211ontario.ca](http://www.211ontario.ca) has a list of communities in Ontario that offer this service. Or you can just dial 2-1-1 on your phone to see if you will be linked to the service.
- **911 Emergency Service.** If you are having a life-threatening emergency, you can dial 9-1-1 to call an ambulance, police, or firefighters. The service is available in many languages.
- **Community Health Centres.** Many parts of Ontario have a community health centre. They generally provide health care and health promotion services. The staff consists of doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, health promoters, community health workers, and other health professionals. The service is free but you will need to pay for tests if you do not have an Ontario Health Card or private health insurance. You will need to find out if you live in a neighbourhood that has this service since they only serve people who live in their area. A list of community health centres is available at [www.aohc.org](http://www.aohc.org).
- **Ontario Early Years Centres.** These are places where parents and caregivers can go with their children to take different programs and do some activities. Parents can get answers to questions they may have by talking to professionals, other parents, and caregivers in the community ([www.ontario.ca/earlyyears](http://www.ontario.ca/earlyyears)). You can call 1-866-821-7770 to find the location of the Ontario Early Years Centre closest to you. This service is free.



- **Public Health.** All parts of Ontario are serviced by a public health unit. They provide many programs and services to help women and their families have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. The Public Health Nurses and Home Visitors will provide advice and help you find the services you need. You can ask them if there is a Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program in your area. Most of their services are free, but you may need to pay for some services such as prenatal classes. In some cases, there is no fee for prenatal classes for low-income women. For a list of public health units and their services, see [www.publichealthontario.ca](http://www.publichealthontario.ca).
- **Service Canada.** Service Canada is a central service for all Government of Canada services. To contact them, visit [www.servicecanada.gc.ca](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca) or call 1-800-O-Canada (1-800-622-6232).
- **Service Ontario.** Service Ontario is a central service for all Government of Ontario services. To contact them, visit [www.serviceontario.ca](http://www.serviceontario.ca) or call 1-800-267-8097.
- **Telehealth Ontario.** Telehealth Ontario is provided by the Government of Ontario and is free to all users. You do not need an Ontario Health Insurance number to talk to a Telehealth Ontario nurse. Call 1-866-797-0000. Service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is provided in English and French, with translation support for other languages.

***A call to Telehealth Ontario does not replace 911 – that’s always the first number you should call in emergency situations.***

## More services

- ***Assaulted Women's Help Line.*** This free phone service is available 24 hours a day for women who are facing emotional or physical abuse. It is anonymous and private. They offer service in 150 languages (1-866-863-0511; [www.awhl.org](http://www.awhl.org)).
- ***Association of Ontario Midwives.*** The website describes the role of a midwife and will help you find a midwife in your area (1-866-418-3773; [www.aom.on.ca](http://www.aom.on.ca)).
- ***Citizenship and Immigration Canada.*** This federal government department assists people who want to immigrate and newcomers to Canada. Services include immigration, citizenship registration, and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) (1-888-242-2100; [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)).
- ***Community Care Access Centres.*** These centres offer services in the home for people who need help but cannot go to a hospital or institution. An assessment of need will be done and you must have an Ontario Health Card to obtain these services. A list of Community Care Access Centres is available at [www.310CCAC.ca](http://www.310CCAC.ca); 310-2222.
- ***LEAP Program.*** LEAP is a community program delivered by Ontario Works. It helps young parents (aged 16 to 25) who are on social assistance and want to finish high school, get work experience, and learn about being a parent. To learn more, visit [www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/programs/social/questions/LEAP.aspx](http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/programs/social/questions/LEAP.aspx).
- ***Mental Health Service Information Ontario.*** The Ontario government provides this mental health information and referral service (on depression, anxiety, or problems with coping). Interpreters are available in 140 languages. (1-866-531-2600; [www.mhsio.on.ca](http://www.mhsio.on.ca)). Many parts of Ontario also have a local distress centre. To see a list of these, visit [www.dcontario.org/centres.html](http://www.dcontario.org/centres.html).

- ***Motherisk.*** A program of the Hospital for Sick Children (in Toronto). This free service focuses on the safety of medications, products, and environmental exposures for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding (1-877-327-4636; [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)).
- ***Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.*** This non-profit organization has a list of member groups that represent many ethnic and cultural groups (416-322-4950; [www.ocasi.org](http://www.ocasi.org)).
- ***Ontario Human Rights Commission.*** This organization administers the Ontario Human Rights Code, which protects people in Ontario against discrimination (1-800-387-9080; [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)).
- ***Ontario Immigration.*** An Ontario Government website designed for potential and new immigrants to Ontario ([www.ontarioimmigration.ca](http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca)).
- ***Settlement.org.*** This website is part of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. It offers information in more than 30 languages as well as links to resources across the province, such as Newcomer Information Centres. [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org).
- ***Settlement agencies.*** The Government of Canada provides services to immigrants through Citizenship and Immigration Canada ([www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)). The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration also offers information services through its [www.ontarioimmigration.ca](http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca) website.
- ***Transportation.*** Check with your town or city to see what types of transportation exist, such as bus routes, subways, etc. Many local agencies such as public health units and community health centres offer some transportation services to help people use their services. If you have transportation problems, ask if this service is available.



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180, Dundas Street W., Suite 301, Toronto ON M5G 1Z8 • 1-800-397-9567 • [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)



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