



Covid-19 has caused many non-essential NHS services to be put on hold, others including anti-natal classes are being offered digitally.

For pregnant people or new parents this can be a very anxious time, as we are hearing.

Drawing on the findings of the perinatal mental health project carried out by another local Healthwatch (Wokingham) this offers information for expectant or new parents in West Sussex.

BABY ON BOARD

Antenatal Appointments

Antenatal appointments are still being offered face to face in most cases, these are for the pregnant woman only. The majority of these will be with a midwife in order to free up GPs. More details about changes to maternity services can be found in our [COVID-19 Health and Care Questions Answered](#)

It is very important that you attend all your appointments and antenatal screening tests. Please contact your midwife straight away if you experience reduced movements or you are worried about your own or your baby's health.

Your mental health is important too. You can talk to your midwife, make an online GP appointment or self-refer to [talking therapies](#).

I was referred to talking therapies by my GP for anxiety in pregnancy. They have been great and because all my appointments are on the phone, I have been able to carry on while isolating.

What about my baby's birth?

Our Hospitals have had to make some difficult decisions

about which services can be offered safely. These are being reviewed all the time and hospitals are keeping their Facebook pages updated with the latest information.

Healthwatch West Sussex acknowledge that this uncertainty could be very difficult for you as you prepare for welcoming your baby into the world.

You'll have the opportunity to discuss your wishes with your midwife during your antenatal appointments and should be kept updated about the latest developments. Creating a birth plan with your partner is a good way of feeling more prepared and confident. It will also help to inform your midwife during labour if you are not able to have your chosen birth partner with you. This free visual birth plan is a popular addition to the maternity notes.

<https://www.pinterandmartin.com/vbp>

The World Health Organisation have stated (21/3/20) that all women have a right to a safe and dignified birth whether or not, they have a Covid-19 infection. This includes:

- Being treated with respect and dignity
- Having a companion of choice present during delivery
- Clear communication by maternity staff
- Appropriate pain relief strategies
- Mobility in labour where possible, and birth position of choice.



If you have concerns about your care you can contact Healthwatch West Sussex on 0300 012 0122 or email: enquiries@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

Postnatal Support

During the time after giving birth many midwife or health visitor appointments will be offered remotely, either via video call or telephone. You should get your *Red Book* before your expected date.

The Health Visiting service will mostly be undertaken by telephone or video appointment but there is a face to face service for those who need it. Please check with your health visitor for updates.

Mental Health Support

We encourage you to pro-actively contact your midwife, health visitor or GP if you have any concerns about you or your partner's mental health. Most mental health services are still running, see [here](#) for details.

Information gathered from the Healthwatch survey found that 75% of mothers with perinatal depression or anxiety noticed that their mental health had deteriorated before anyone else, but many were reluctant to seek help straight away.

When you are finding things really difficult you don't want to go out. We didn't want to ask for help, we thought we should be OK.

However, getting help early on may help to reduce the severity of any mental health issue, help you to bond with their baby and reduce overall anxiety.

There are online or telephone options, so you don't need to wait for the end of lockdown to get the support you need.



Breastfeeding Support

Although face to face contact isn't possible right now, you can find online support for breastfeeding from various sources. During our survey we heard that good breastfeeding support can improve parent's wellbeing.

You can find information about breastfeeding with COVID in our [COVID-19 Health and Care Questions Answered](#)

You may also find [this](#) video about feeding during the pandemic, useful.

It was great to have breastfeeding support right in my home, I can't imagine leaving the house with a newborn now!

Community groups

Many people value the informal support offered by community groups. You can join some local groups online to start building a network of other parents.

NCT virtual support including video link breast feeding support, coffee groups and story/ song groups via [Facebook](#)

Ask your midwife about what local groups are available locally - many of the hospitals offer closed Facebook groups for new parents.

[Family Assist](#) is a source of valuable information and will soon have information for all West Sussex residents.

