

River Valley Birth Center clients,

Many aspects of this letter were published on Facebook on 3-12-2020, but please read as we had updated and added additional information.

We have entered into uncharted territories as we are all now facing a global pandemic and life as we know it seems to be changing with announcements at a rapid rate. We know you all have heard about COVID-19 (also referred to as novel coronavirus or some shorten it to coronavirus) as media coverage is pretty vast. We have been watching the situation develop for weeks while creating a plan. We hoped we would never actually be in a situation of needing to utilize a policy we never thought we would need to write, but now is the time we need to begin implementing it.

The challenge with COVID-19 is that it spreads rapidly and can be incredibly serious for certain members of a community with a high hospitalization rate, prolonged ICU stays, and a high rate of death in vulnerable populations. While we understand that the most current information is reassuring for outcomes of pregnant women and their newborns, our newest guidelines are based on the benefits/risks to the entire community/staff/all clients/and extended families of all involved. This illness is spread from person to person and since nearly everyone has people who are considered “high risk” in their lives, we must all do what we can to offer protection to the most vulnerable among us.

Freestanding birth centers have always been understood to be a place of health and wellness. One of the draws of a birth center is that there are no other departments in the same building in which the sick and contagious are being seen and treated. The waiting room is not filled with ill people. We need to keep our facility a place of wellness. If our staff remains healthy, we are able to help keep you healthy.

Guidelines are subject to change rapidly, depending on the rapidly changing information and environment. If you have any questions, reach out to us. If there are issues, we can all work together to find solutions.

Beginning March 12, 2020, these new guidelines were implemented at River Valley Birth Center:

- We are minimizing the risk of transmission between people, so we are canceling all classes, group tours, and orientation sessions held by RVBC. We are able to schedule phone orientation sessions or virtual meetings with interested families.
- We are now asking that only a client or client and their significant other attend appointments. No additional guests.
- While it pains us because you all know we ADORE children, we also know that they may show such minor symptoms of illness that they are easy to overlook and yet, those same germs may spread easily to staff and other adults who may become significantly ill, so we

have moved to a no children policy for the time being. Also, because we won't discriminate based on the age of our little germ factories, this policy exists because any number of children traveling with you would be considered "visitors" or "guests" since they are not currently patients. Of course, we will still treat the newborns born through 6 weeks of life.

- For the safety of all staff, clients, and babies, no one may enter the birth center if they have symptoms of cold/flu/COVID-19.
- When entering (we also recommend when leaving) please either wash hands or use the hand sanitizer located on the reception desk. Please also apply a facemask. We promise to do the same.
- Speak to your midwife at a prenatal visit about exactly who you plan on attending the birth. Make sure that if you have a doula that they understand that they will not be allowed to attend if they have any signs of illness.
- We require that if anyone in your family/home is sick or you are sick that any in-person visits are rescheduled.

Appointments and the introduction of virtual appointments.

- During the week of March 23-March 27, we will reschedule all non-essential appointments to a later date as this gives us time to distribute "virtual appointment kits" to our clients. These kits will contain equipment and instructions on how to utilize each device to monitor your health and well-being. Many prenatal and postpartum visits will be conducted via phone or a virtual meeting depending on technology availability that each family has. This will allow for us to maintain connections with all of our clients and allows us to continue to monitor health during a time when we are all trying to limit exposure to others.
- In-person appointments will still occur for the initial prenatal appointment, 36 weeks, and all visits at/beyond 40 weeks. If additional in-person visits are needed we will be able to accommodate that as well for issues such as reduced fetal movement, Rhogam administration, or any major problems or concerns that develop. All clients should anticipate being screened for signs of illness as they enter the building. We are requiring the same of any and all of our staff as well. And obviously, we will still be attending the births in person!
- In the postpartum period, we will still do a home visit at 24-48 hours to perform screenings. Families will then be provided with additional supplies including a newborn scale so that we can have virtual appointments for mom and baby for 4-6 weeks. Once again, if additional visits are needed to occur in-person we will accommodate that. At the end of the postpartum

time (4-6 wks), clients will need to make arrangements to get the kit returned to RVBC. We will work as a team to figure out the easiest way to accomplish this together for each individual family.

- Our goal is to reduce everyone's risks. Our virtual appointments will still be scheduled in an orderly manner with a provider who can give you their full attention to answer any questions or concerns and provide the same guidance and education as our in-person visits, but with less chance for exchanging germs.
- Labs and ultrasounds will still be available in the normal fashion.

Rescheduling visits:

Clients are never penalized for rescheduling visits. We offer these guidelines as reasons to reschedule/timelines. Keep in mind the reasons we list are as related to actual illness. If you vomit because of morning sickness or have diarrhea because of taking castor oil at 41 weeks, that doesn't count. These rescheduling guidelines only apply to in-person visits. One of the benefits of virtual appointments is that we can continue with visits even if someone in the house is ill:

- Fever- wait at least 48 hours post fever resolution (taking Tylenol to lower it doesn't count as it being resolved)
- Diarrhea- wait at least 48 hours post.
- If you have current symptoms of flu or COVID-19, if anyone in your home has either illness, or if you have known exposure. RVBC will not be offering testing for COVID-19.
- If in doubt about illness guidelines and what you should do, give us a call! We will troubleshoot together.

Contacting and communicating with your care team:

As a team, we have made the choice to begin self-isolating and working from home as much as possible. We are staggering our staffing of the birth center to limit our exposure to one another so that the only time 2 or more of us are in the same space is for births. We will primarily conduct our virtual visits from our homes as well. This allows the facility plenty of time to "breathe". Due to this, though, there is generally not someone scheduled to answer the office phone. We are checking messages at least once per day and returning phone calls. If you call the office number, please leave a detailed message so the appropriate person can call you back. At this time it is more efficient to utilize the patient portal for questions, concerns, billing or administrative help or to reschedule visits and will feel less frustrating to many people than constantly reaching an answering machine.

The on-call number is still active and will be answered in the same manner during all of this. You can reach a midwife immediately by calling 507-934-1301.

As a team we will all be working together to help protect those we love in our communities. We love and appreciate you all so much! Follow our Facebook page for additional information and announcements as things change.

Thank you,

River Valley Birth Center