



MODERN MATERNITY CARE OPTIONS

By Leah Laroche-Paperno, LM, CPM

From the moment those two pink lines change the course of life forever, many questions rise to the surface. Studies show that couples spend 528 hours, or 22 round-the-clock days, planning their wedding, but many spend less than an hour choosing their pregnancy healthcare provider and location. This disparity falls short of honoring the truly indelible experience of pregnancy, birth, and parenthood.

To ensure the best experience, start by exploring the resources in your area. Pregnancies fall into two categories, referred to as “low risk” or “high risk”. It is important to consider any pre-existing or pregnancy-related risk factors when assessing your birthing options. While all pregnancies will need access to the most comprehensive resources available, low-risk pregnancies are less likely to experience complications. A high-risk pregnancy is more likely to experience a complication and will want immediate access to high-level medical intervention, such as the hospital. The choices will each have unique benefits and drawbacks.

Hospital Birth

The hospital setting provides the highest level of medical capabilities. As the most common choice, the hospital is often what people will feel most comfortable with at first glance. For high-risk pregnancies, the hospital is often the most obvious care plan.

There are many factors to consider when choosing an OB/GYN and hospital. For example, what are the hospital’s rates of Cesarean birth? While Cesarean can be life-saving, it also comes with risks of its own. A higher rate of Cesarean does not always equal better care. American hospitals have an average Cesarean birth rate of about 31%, while the World Health Organization recommends a Cesarean rate of 10%-15% as being safest for both parents and babies.

Here are some other questions to ask when considering your hospital:

- Does the hospital provide continuous monitoring or intermittent monitoring for baby? Continuous monitoring is ideal for a high-risk labor while intermittent monitoring will be appropriate for a low-risk laboring person and allows more freedom of movement while still being safe.
- What is the rate of epidural anesthesia? Epidurals offer effective pain relief, but carry risks just like any medication. Does the hospital support your choice to give birth naturally?
- Does the hospital have an NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) if your baby needs advanced care?
- What does the nursing staff have to offer? In labor, you’ll spend far more time with your nurse than with your doctor. Even the most dedicated nurses may be caring for multiple patients. Consider hiring a doula to provide continuous support, and/or taking a childbirth education class to be prepared for the medical events and sensations.

If you are considering an unmedicated birth, the hospital may not be your only option. Midwives provide care in the out-of-hospital setting and are available for anyone who is low-risk and wishes to avoid unneeded interventions. Licensed midwives (LM) and certified nurse midwives (CNM) work in home birth practices and free-standing birthing centers. They are considered primary care providers for healthy pregnancies.

The midwifery model is rooted in a holistic approach, with built-in informed choice and advocacy. Prenatal care with midwives mirrors the standard obstetrical schedule of appointments and includes testing such as genetic testing, routine labs and ultrasounds. Midwives assess the growth of the baby as well as monitor the wellbeing of the parent. Each appointment with your midwife should offer individualized support, evidence-based information, and relevant birth and postpartum preparation. An often overlooked aspect of midwifery care is what's offered in the postpartum. Midwives offer multiple appointments after birth for the parent and baby. Your midwife may even come to your home for some of your visits.

Home Birth with a Midwife

Home birth is available in many communities with a licensed midwife or certified nurse midwife. In addition to providing prenatal care, midwives will monitor you and your baby on an evidence-based schedule during labor. This includes maternal vitals, monitoring of the baby, and vaginal exams to assess progress. Some of the more personal benefits of home birth are more privacy, more agency over who attends your birth, and not having to travel further than your own living room. Home birth offers a Cesarean rate well below that of U.S. hospitals, with good outcomes for mothers and babies.

An important question when talking about any birth outside the hospital is, "What happens if there's an emergency?" Midwives

monitor labor in the spirit of facilitating the normal, while catching danger signs early. In this way, they can transition to the planned hospital of choice before an emergency occurs. The hospital transport rate for out-of-hospital birth varies from 10%-25% depending on the practice you choose and your individual risk factors.

Sometimes emergencies arise with no warning. The more common birth emergencies are shoulder dystocia, postpartum hemorrhage, and a baby who needs some assistance breathing. A midwife with a current license will carry medications to stop bleeding, is trained and practiced in the resolution of dystocia, and is certified in neonatal resuscitation, or helping a newborn breathe. Your midwife may also carry urinary catheters, IV fluids, prophylactic antibiotics, oxygen, pulse oximeter, and routine newborn medications.

While all midwives licensed by the Medical Board of California practice under the protocols, guidelines and laws as defined by their respective licensure, each midwife brings their own experience and style to your care.

Birth Center with a Midwife

The idea of birthing at home is not a fit for everyone, however, and you may be left wondering if there are any options between the hospital and the home birth experience. The answer is free-standing birth centers! Unaffiliated with a hospital and usually staffed with licensed and/or nurse midwives, birth centers are a safe option for low-risk birth. A birth

center provides all the benefits of the midwifery model with the advantage of a familiar clinic setting and an intimate group practice style.

A birth center may be right for you if...

- You want close proximity to emergency services
- You lack privacy or space in your home
- The size or location of your home is not ideal or easily accessible in all seasons
- You have other young children at home
- You share your home with extended family or housemates
- You desire to be in a space that is designed and intended for birth

The reasons for transfer to hospital from a birthing center are the same as those that would necessitate a transfer to the hospital from birth at home. Birthing centers will supply the same emergency equipment and medications that

a midwife would offer you at a home birth.

Nevada County is fortunate to have two hospital options; Sierra Nevada Memorial and Tahoe Forest. Nevada County also has an array of licensed midwives offering home birth. A list of home birth midwives can be found at thenest-familyresource.com.

Nevada County is celebrating its fourth year of having its very own free-standing birth center! Mariposa Birth Center (mariposabirth.com) is located in the heart of Nevada City and is staffed by licensed midwives and certified nurse midwives. Mariposa collaborates with lactation consultants, childbirth education services, doulas and other holistic and mainstream medical providers creating a true village of professional support around each and every family through their important birthing journey. ✨



BY LEAH LAROCHE-PATERNO, LM, CPM

Leah is a licensed midwife and the co-owner of Mariposa Birth Center located in Nevada City. Leah is passionate about every birthing person receiving the compassionate, skilled, and empowering maternity care they truly deserve. Leah's midwifery training was through one of the country's busiest birthing centers and MEAC accredited midwifery school in the borderland of El Paso, TX. It was in this unique and intense setting that her deep love of and commitment to informed birth and the midwifery model of care was born. Leah completed her rigorous training and residency at Maternidad La Luz, having attended over 340 births by the time she moved back to her home in the foothills of California. She began working at Mariposa Birth Center in 2019 and became co-owners with midwife Summer Lujan LM/CPM in 2020. As a mother, midwife and community healthcare provider, Leah is honored to serve her community.

