

MIDWIFERY REGULATORY COUNCIL OF NOVA SCOTIA

SECOND ATTENDANT POLICY

As set out in the Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia (MRCNS) *Policy on Out-of-Hospital Birth*, the standards for home birth include the attendance of two registered midwives, or a midwife and a qualified/approved second attendant, during the 2nd stage of labour and the immediate postpartum period. For out-of-hospital births, the primary attending midwife will be assisted by either a second midwife or another health professional who is qualified to assist in the second attendant role.

Qualified second birth attendants may include:

- Senior midwifery students in clerkship¹ or an equivalent stage of midwifery education programs recognized by the MRCNS
- Physicians
- Nurse Practitioners
- Registered Nurses
- Paramedics
- Respiratory Therapists

Midwives must notify the MRCNS Registrar in writing of the names and professional qualifications of second birth attendants they are working with who are not registered midwives. Only midwives with an active-practicing (clinical) licence without conditions or restrictions may attend out-of-hospital births with second attendants who are not registered midwives.

As the primary care provider, the midwife is responsible for care of the mother and baby during labour, birth and the immediate postpartum period in the out-of-hospital setting, and must ensure that the second birth attendant's conduct and actions are consistent with the *Standards of Midwifery Practice, Philosophy of Care* and *Code of Ethics* of the MRCNS.

The midwife must not delegate acts to a second birth attendant who is not legally authorized to perform them, and may not ask a second attendant to provide client care beyond and the roles and duties outlined in this policy. The second attendant may only provide care and perform delegated acts that are within her or his own scope of practice, *under the direction and in-person supervision of the attending midwife*.

¹ Clerkship occurs in the final (4th) year of Canadian university midwifery education programs. The student midwife has successfully completed required courses in emergency skills and neonatal resuscitation, and has been assessed by her program as competent to provide primary care as part of her clerkship training under the direct supervision of a midwife preceptor.

The attending midwife must be present in the out-of-hospital setting at all times when a non-midwife second attendant is assisting with care. Solo attendance with a woman in labour is not an appropriate responsibility for a non-midwife second attendant at a planned home birth.

Required competencies for second birth attendants

For out-of-hospital births, it is the role of the attending midwife to monitor and support the normal labour and birth process and provide safe, competent care to the mother and baby. This includes identifying any clinical indications that require transfer to hospital and conducting the necessary measures in emergency situations. As such, the role of the second attendant is to provide appropriate assistance to the midwife who is the primary/ most responsible care provider.

Second attendant competency requirements are consistent with the home birth context in which the woman is low risk and a midwife is in continuous attendance. While current labour and delivery experience is an asset, it is not a requirement as the competencies that second attendants must possess are common to many health care professionals and are not necessarily specific to childbirth. Orientation with midwives in DHA/ IWK sites should ensure that second attendants understand midwifery care and procedures in home births and are prepared to provide the necessary assistance. Basic skills in neonatal resuscitation and adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation/ basic life support can be acquired through NRP and BLS/CPR programs that midwives and other maternity care providers must take.

Required competencies for second attendants at midwife-attended home births include:

- Basic knowledge of the process of labour and birth
- Basic knowledge and understanding of midwifery practice and policies for out-of-hospital birth in Nova Scotia
- Familiarity with instruments, supplies and equipment used for home births
- Ability to apply universal precautions and sterile technique
- Ability to assist with auscultation of fetal heart rate
- Ability to assess maternal vital signs: blood pressure, pulse, temperature
- Ability to assess newborn heart rate, respirations, colour and temperature
- Ability to assess maternal blood loss and tone/position of the uterus and bladder in the immediate postpartum period
- Ability to administer medications by intramuscular injection, as directed by the primary care provider
- Ability to assist with initiation and maintenance of intravenous infusion therapy
- Ability to document appropriately
- Successful completion of a Neonatal Resuscitation (NRP) Provider course within the past two years

- Successful completion of a Basic Life Support/Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) course within the past two years.

Roles and duties of second attendants

The role of the second attendant is to assist the attending midwife during the 2nd and 3rd stages of labour in a planned out-of-hospital birth. At the discretion of the midwife, the second attendant may be present prior to the 2nd stage of labour.

Under the direction and supervision of the attending midwife, the second attendant may be requested to assist in the following capacities within her or his scope of practice:

- Provide practical assistance to the midwife
- Provide appropriate support to the woman
- Check maternal blood pressure, pulse and/or temperature during labour
- Assist with auscultation of the fetal heart rate
- Assist with preparation and set up of instruments, supplies and equipment for delivery
- Record time of birth and delivery of placenta
- Observe newborn condition and assess heart rate, respirations and colour at 1 minute and 5 minutes
- Check newborn heart rate, respirations, colour and temperature in the immediate postpartum
- Check maternal vitals, blood loss, uterine fundus and bladder in the immediate postpartum
- Assist with set up of instruments and supplies for perineal suturing if required
- Assist with general clean up after birth and disposal of used materials and placenta
- Document actions in the client's chart

In emergency situations the second attendant may also be requested to:

- Telephone Emergency Health Services and provide pertinent information
- Telephone the receiving hospital and provide pertinent information
- Prepare and/or administer medications as directed by midwife
- Assist the midwife in setting up intravenous infusion therapy
- Assist the midwife with neonatal resuscitation or CPR
- Assist with other measures such as McRoberts or knee-chest positioning as directed by midwife
- Assist with preparations for transport

The second attendant's role and performance in normal births and emergency situations must be regularly reviewed with midwives and employers in DHA/ IWK sites to ensure continuing competency and quality improvement.

Midwives must be aware that actions by second attendants outside the roles and responsibilities outlined in this policy, and/or outside the second attendant's scope of practice, may affect their professional liability coverage. All regulated health professionals remain responsible to their own regulatory bodies for the care they provide. It is the responsibility of the second attendant to confirm with her or his regulatory authority whether there are any restrictions on providing assistance and support during a midwife-attended out-of-hospital birth.

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