

Dear Mother-to-be

Making sure our Labour Wards are never too busy to provide safe care

I am writing to let you know that the Trust is taking action to make sure our labour wards at Queen's Hospital and King George Hospital never become so busy that we cannot provide women in labour with safe care. We appreciate that the action we are taking may inconvenience some women, and are very sorry about this. However, the safety of women in labour and their babies is our highest priority and we take it extremely seriously.

Why is this necessary?

Very few babies are born on their due date, so it is hard to predict exactly how busy our labour ward will be each day. There are peaks and troughs in the number of deliveries, some days are very busy, others much less so. We need to make sure that the units are never too busy to provide safe care.

What action is being taken?

We are closely monitoring the number of women in labour each day. On a busy day, when more than a certain number of women are already on the labour ward, other women will be asked to have their babies at neighbouring hospitals unless they need very urgent care. Women living Essex (outside the London boroughs of Havering, Barking and Dagenham, Waltham Forest or Redbridge) are being asked to plan their deliveries at hospitals in Essex – Basildon or Broomfield – instead.

What should I do when I go into labour?

Women should call the maternity triage number on 01708 503 742 as normal. A senior midwife will talk to you and if you need to come into hospital, she will let you know if you have to go elsewhere. The majority of women will be unaffected and will still be able to have their baby at Queen's or King George Hospital. You will only be asked to deliver elsewhere if there is a risk that the Queen's or King George Hospital unit is too busy to guarantee the safety of you and your baby, or women requiring more urgent care.

What if I need very urgent care and don't have time to go elsewhere?

Women who need urgent care will still be able to receive it at Queen's or King George Hospital. We need to keep this capacity free for any women who need very urgent care.

Is the care at Queen's safe?

The safety of your care is our highest priority. We are taking this action so that we are never too busy to provide safe care. You may have heard reports of problems at Queen's in the past, and we have taken a whole series of actions to improve safety and make sure every woman can have a positive experience of childbirth. We now have one of the best midwife to birth ratios and levels of senior doctor cover in London. We want to make further improvements so you can be confident about the care we provide.

If I can't give birth at Queen's or King George Hospital, where will I have my baby?

The majority of women will continue to be able to have their baby at Queen's or King George Hospital. If you go into labour on a very busy day, when you call the midwife on the triage line, she will talk to you about where you would like to go instead and check they have space. This could be the other BHRUT hospital (King George or Queen's) or another hospital such as Newham, Whipps Cross or Basildon.

I am scheduled to have my labour induced, how does this affect me?

Please call in on the day your labour is due to be induced. If King George Hospital or Queen's is too busy to guarantee safe care, your induction may be rescheduled or arranged in another hospital.

I am scheduled to have a planned caesarean, how does this affect me?

From mid-October, women will have their planned caesarean sections at the Homerton. From mid-December, women will once more be able to have these at Queen's. Women living in Essex (outside the London boroughs of Havering, Barking and Dagenham, Waltham Forest or Redbridge) will have their baby at Broomfield or Basildon.

If I have to give birth at another hospital, will they be expecting me?

Arrangements are being made so that women can be properly cared for if they need to have their baby at another hospital. Please take your notes with you when you go into hospital.

I am scheduled to give birth at King George – does this affect me?

Only if King George is too busy to provide safe care, in which case, women will be directed to other hospitals including Queen's.

My baby's birth is expected to be complicated – does this affect me?

Women who need the specialist services at King George Hospital or Queen's will still be able to access them or equivalent care provided elsewhere.

What action is the Trust taking on staffing?

On staffing, the Trust has worked to increase staffing levels, both to keep pace with the rising birth rate and to improve our ratio of staff to births. Over the last two years, we have funded an extra 70 midwife posts and appointed an extra 72 midwives this year alone. We have introduced new staffing rotas to make sure that each shift has more staff to look after women and their babies.

What other steps are being taken to improve services?

We are also redesigning services at Queen's Hospital to make care safer, and improve the experience of women in labour. For example, a new reception area has opened so that women arriving in the maternity department will be seen immediately by an experienced senior midwife and sent straight to the most appropriate ward.

Who can I speak to if I have any concerns about my care?

We want to make sure that every woman has the best possible experience of their pregnancy and labour, without unnecessary stress and anxiety. A clinician will call you if we need to discuss alternatives for where you give birth. If you have any clinical concerns, you can speak to your midwife or call the labour triage line.