

Birth Care Outside Regulated Midwifery in Ontario

Information for Pregnant People, Families, & Support People

Choosing how and with whom you give birth is one of the most personal decisions you will ever make. These choices are often made thoughtfully, with the intention of ensuring an autonomous but safe and positive experience for the pregnant person and the baby.

The following information is not intended to judge those decisions. It is meant to help people understand important safety risks. It explains the laws about who can provide pregnancy and birth care in Ontario, and describes how the College of Midwives of Ontario depends on information from the public to help keep people safe.

This information applies to situations where unregulated individuals provide guidance or support that influences health decisions, risk assessment, or health care during pregnancy, labour, birth, or the postpartum period. It does not apply to regulated health professionals working within their scope, Indigenous or Aboriginal midwives practising legally within their communities, or doulas who provide non-clinical emotional and practical support without assessing risk or directing health or midwifery care.

A Few Important Things to Know About Pregnancy & Birth

Most pregnancies and births go well and do not require medical interventions. Sometimes, serious and unpredictable complications can arise quickly, even when everything seems normal or low risk.

Some emergencies are obvious. Others begin with subtle warning signs that require specific training and experience to recognize early.

When those signs are missed or acted upon too late, the consequences can be serious for both the pregnant person and the baby.

This is why knowledge, skills, and judgement in birth services matter, including the ability to recognize serious risks and knowing when to consider emergency care.

Unregulated Pregnancy & Birth Services

People offering pregnancy or birth services outside the regulated health system may be caring, trusted, and well-intentioned. However, when care is not provided by regulated health professionals, there are limits to the protections available to people and families.

When care is not provided by a regulated health professional:

- ▶ There is no independent way to confirm a person's education, training, or experience.
- ▶ There may be no shared standards for safe or ethical practice.
- ▶ There may be no clear expectation to share appropriate information, recognize complications, or respond when risks increase.

- ▶ There may be no accountability or review process if serious harm occurs, including for payment of fees or other agreements related to the care provided.

Many people providing care outside the system describe their role as a "traditional birth attendant" or promoting a "sovereign birth." They may say they don't provide midwifery or medical care but do provide "education" or "information." When information guides health decisions, assesses risk, or influences care during pregnancy, labour, birth, or the postpartum period, it can function as health advice and the provision of midwifery care, even if there are no diagnoses or medical procedures.

When risks are serious, health advice given outside the regulated health system may have limits in quality and accountability.



Why Midwifery Regulation Matters

Midwifery is a regulated health profession in Ontario. Regulation ensures that care is provided by professionals whose education and skills can be verified and who are accountable to the public for their actions. Health regulation is not about limiting your choice or personal connection; it exists to make sure care and advice are provided safely.

Regulation sets clear expectations for practice and includes a process for review if concerns arise. These protections are not in place when care is provided by someone who is not a regulated health professional.

The Role of the College & the Law

The College of Midwives of Ontario regulates midwifery in the public interest. Our mandate is to protect the public by setting standards for safe midwifery care and addressing situations where people are practising the profession or providing health advice without legally being able to do so.

Ontario law limits who can practise midwifery. Midwifery practice includes assessing or monitoring pregnancy, labour, birth, the postpartum period, and the care of newborns. It also includes reviewing or

interpreting any test results and managing or conducting births. The law also applies when guidance or advice is given in situations involving a risk of serious bodily harm.

When we receive information suggesting that someone may be practising midwifery or providing health advice outside the law, we review it and where appropriate, take steps to protect public safety.



If Something Feels Unclear or Concerning

The College may not always hear about care or health advice provided outside the regulated system. To protect the public, we depend on information from clients, families, and support people to identify situations where care or advice may be provided illegally under Ontario law.

Sharing information is not about blame or judgement. **Your information could help the College become aware of practices that could place pregnant people or babies at risk, whether you have a concern yourself or are noticing something that may be unsafe.**

Each report is reviewed carefully, on a case-by-case basis, helping us understand patterns, assess concerns, and take steps to reduce future harm.



Some situations reported by clients, families, and regulated health professionals may indicate unauthorized practice.

Watch for cases where people:

- ▶ Receive health guidance or advice that normally requires professional training and oversight.
- ▶ Are encouraged to stop seeing, or “fire,” a licensed health professional.
- ▶ Have health concerns dismissed as a “variation of normal” or are offered remedies that seem unusual or unsafe.
- ▶ Are told to “trust their body” and to not seek medical attention, despite experiencing worrisome or concerning symptoms.

- ▶ Are asked to provide false information about their pregnancy, birth, or provider when interacting with hospitals or regulated professionals.
- ▶ Have a provider who refuses to accompany them to a hospital if they choose or need to go.

Clients and families are encouraged to be aware of these situations and seek a second opinion from a regulated health professional if anything feels concerning. Everyone has the right to safe, professional, and regulated care.

How to Contact the College

If you have questions, concerns, or information to share please contact us.



Email: conduct@cmo.on.ca or practiceadvice@cmo.on.ca



Phone: 416-640-2252
(or toll-free in Ontario at 1-844-640-2252)

Additional information about unauthorized or illegal practice can be found on the [College's website](https://cmo.on.ca/clients-and-the-public/unauthorized-or-illegal-practice/) at <https://cmo.on.ca/clients-and-the-public/unauthorized-or-illegal-practice/>

It includes a list of individuals who have already come to the College's attention.

Sharing concerns about practices that may put people at risk, families and support people help the College protect others and make care safer for everyone.