

Isolated incident in our maternity unit

We are investigating an incident in our maternity unit in September 2023 in which a baby was temporarily handed to the wrong mother. We deeply regret any distress that was caused and are committed to providing full support to the affected families. The safety of our parents and babies is the highest priority. We have fully reviewed all our safety procedures and we want to reassure you this was an isolated incident.

We appreciate this matter may raise concerns and hope the below FAQs are helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any further questions you might have.

Frequently asked questions:

- **How do I know I won't be given the wrong baby?**

All babies have two name bands placed around their ankles as soon as possible after the birth. These name bands clearly identify who the baby belongs to.

We encourage parents to let us know if the bands are too loose, and/or could fall off. If this does occur the bands can be replaced with a tighter version.

If we were to discover a baby without any bands, for example if they have fallen off when the baby is being changed, and caught within clothing that has been taken home, our process would be to check every baby in the maternity unit before 'rebanding' the correct baby.

Every day, we check that the bands are securely in place.

If staff should be temporarily caring for your baby, when reunited, bands will be rechecked.

Alongside the name bands all babies will also have a security alarm tag in place, which is triggered if the baby is taken off the ward, or the device is disconnected.

- **Who can I speak to if I have any concerns?**

We would encourage you to speak to your community midwife in the first instance; this may be in your next antenatal appointment. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is here for you to discuss any concerns you might have with your current care. You can contact them at <https://www.uhd.nhs.uk/about-us/patient-experience/pals> or call 0300 019 8499.

There is also a manager on call for the maternity unit who would be happy to speak with you if you have concerns.

- **What is the process when I take my baby home for the first time?**

Since this incident we have reminded staff to ensure a member of our team always walks out with you when you take your baby home for the first time.

- **What other actions have you taken since this incident?**

We would like to provide reassurance to all of our women, birthing people and their families that we are dedicated to providing a safe space and service for you to have your baby at St Mary's Maternity Unit. We have looked at the issues raised following the reported incident and have already made improvements to ensure that the concerns raised are addressed and resolved.

- **Are there enough staff to look after me?**

Yes. We review our staffing every day to ensure it is safe. We have very few vacancies for midwives and will soon be fully recruited. In the next few months we will also have fully recruited all of our maternity support workers and continue to recruit into our medical workforce.

- **Can I move hospitals?**

Yes, you can choose the hospital that you would like to give birth in, and this may not necessarily be the hospital that is closest to where you live. At any point, you are free to change where you would like to have your baby, even if it is very close to your estimated date of delivery. Most hospitals have an online booking system or a form for completion. You can always contact the antenatal clinic of the hospital that you would like to change to and explain the situation. You do not need permission or referral from anyone to change to a new hospital to have your baby. We would encourage you to discuss any concerns with your community midwife in the first instance.

- **Will staff respond in any emergency?**

Our staff have had enhanced training and you can be assured there are clear processes for escalating concerns in an emergency and responding in a timely manner. Our recent CQC maternity survey showed that service users are responded to in a 'timely manner'. We have also installed a new and improved call bell system to ensure you receive the help you need, exactly when you need it.

- **Is staff training regularly monitored?**

Yes, all staff working in the maternity unit undergo regular mandatory training that is responsive to women's needs and patient feedback. We have dedicated clinical leads to ensure good staff performance and confidence, and we are also expanding our training to other staff groups. We have strengthened staff testing and training on issues such as call bell failure and emergency evacuation of birthing pools, and regularly provide training on emergency 'skills and drills'.

We have systems in place to enable more robust recording of staff training compliance, which enables our managers to review any staff training needs.

- **How do you assess, monitor and improve the quality of services (audit)?**

We listen to our patient feedback via complaints, compliments and incident forms as your opinions are really important to us. Regularly monitoring our processes enables us to ensure high quality standards are in place and improvements are made where necessary. We have a dedicated audit midwife and an annual audit plan going forwards. We are also up to date with all outstanding audit reports and have regular meetings between our teams in maternity to present findings, share learnings, and ensure we are always improving.

Feedback from our patients, from Maternity Voices Partnership and from our regulators is important to us to drive development and improvement.

- **Are safety incidents investigated thoroughly?**

Yes, where an issue is reported to us or identified from an investigation, we review and embed this into our future learning and training for staff.

- **How will I know that my feedback is listened to and acted on?**

Safety for parents and babies is our top priority. We have a strong incident response process to engage patients and address issues appropriately. Findings from investigations are used to enhance future staff training and learning.

We were pleased the recent CQC noted in their inspection report that our service has an open culture where women, their families and staff could raise concerns without fear, and that our staff felt respected, supported and valued, and focused on the needs of women receiving care.

We want to provide you with the best possible care at this really important moment in your life. Your experience and feedback really does help improve our services and to identify where things already work well. There are a number of ways to give your feedback, including the Friends and Family Test, and via Maternity Voices. You can also contact our PALS team at any time on 0300 019 8499 or by visiting <https://www.uhd.nhs.uk/about-us/patient-experience/pals>.