



CLINICAL REPORT

Immersion in Water During Labor and Delivery

abstract

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Immersion in water has been suggested as a beneficial alternative for labor, delivery, or both and over the past decades has gained popularity in many parts of the world. Immersion in water during the first stage of labor may be associated with decreased pain or use of anesthesia and decreased duration of labor. However, there is no evidence that immersion in water during the first stage of labor otherwise improves perinatal outcomes, and it should not prevent or inhibit other elements of care. The safety and efficacy of immersion in water during the second stage of labor have not been established, and immersion in water during the second stage of labor has not been associated with maternal or fetal benefit. Given these facts and case reports of rare but serious adverse effects in the newborn, the practice of immersion in the second stage of labor (underwater delivery) should be considered an experimental procedure that only should be performed within the context of an appropriately designed clinical trial with informed consent. Facilities that plan to offer immersion in the first stage of labor need to establish rigorous protocols for candidate selection, maintenance and cleaning of tubs and immersion pools, infection control procedures, monitoring of mothers and fetuses at appropriate intervals while immersed, and immediately and safely moving women out of the tubs if maternal or fetal concerns develop. *Pediatrics* 2014;133:758–761

INTRODUCTION

Immersion in water has been suggested as a beneficial alternative for labor, delivery, or both and over the past decades has gained popularity in many parts of world.^{1–4} Approximately 1% of births in the United Kingdom include at least a period of immersion,⁵ and a 2006 joint statement from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and Royal College of Midwives supported immersion in water during labor for healthy women with uncomplicated pregnancies and stated that to achieve best practice with water birth, it is necessary for organizations to provide systems and structure to support this service.⁶ The prevalence of this practice in the United States is unknown, because such data are not collected as part of

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KEY WORDS

labor, delivery, water birth, immersion, perinatal care

ABBREVIATIONS

CI—confidence interval

RCT—randomized controlled trial

RR—risk ratio

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The recommendations in this report do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

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