

Maternity Voices Partnership Survey: Your pregnancy and birth experience during COVID-19

Summary of Survey Findings

Introduction

Over the month of June the MVP ran a survey to find out how women experienced pregnancy and birth during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 621 completed surveys and a further 265 partially completed surveys (886 responses in total)

We have separated the results into four parts. Part 1 looks at questions around communication. Part 2 were questions directed at women who were still pregnant on 30th June. Part 3 were questions answered by women who gave birth between 1st March and 30th June and the final part looked at the impact COVID-19 had on infant feeding choices

Note: text highlighted in yellow are extracts of responses taken directly from the survey

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Part 1 - Communication

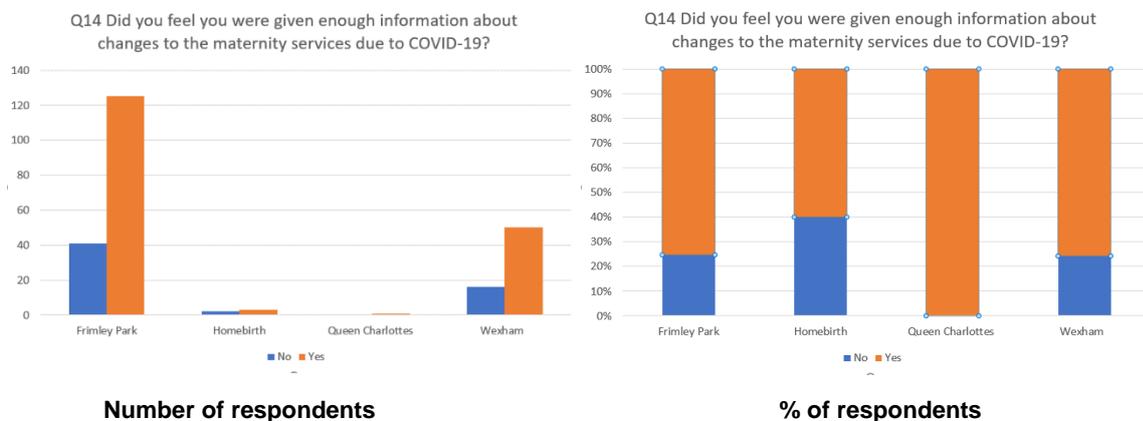
This part of the survey asked how families have kept up to with changes of policies and procedures due to Covid restrictions, and how well informed they have felt.

13. How did you become aware of local changes to NHS services due to COVID-19 that might affect your plans for birth?			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Communication with Midwife		61.25%	147
2	Communication with Consultant		7.92%	19
3	Communication with Health Visitor		5.42%	13
4	Communication with other birth professionals		2.08%	5
5	Friends & Family		19.58%	47
6	Social Media		86.25%	207
7	Other (please specify): View		7.50%	18
			answered	240
			skipped	381

- After Midwife, Social Media plays a huge role in providing latest information to mothers
- Important to keep this channel up to date with latest updates, many using Facebook as their primary info source

14. Did you feel you were given enough information about changes to the maternity services due to COVID-19?			Response Percent	Response Total
1	yes		75.42%	181
2	no		24.58%	59
			answered	240
			skipped	381

- Responses to Q14 can be split to show birth location of respondents (where respondents specified this):



- Three quarters of mothers felt they were given enough info- and where mothers specified the birth location of their babies, performance across Wexham and Frimley was similar

- However approximately a quarter of respondents felt they had not received enough info- Question 34 asks for further information (free text responses):

34. What would you like more information about

Partners	91
Where to find latest info	64
Procedures- what changes due to Covid (incl. safety measures)	59
All good- no further info required	28
Postnatal care	18
Antenatal appointments- are they happening? How to book	15
What will the labour experience be like?	12
Caring for a baby during the pandemic	10
Why is Frimley stricter than other trusts?	7
Masks policy	7
Breastfeeding support	7
When will homebirths resume?	5
Everything	5
C section procedures	5
Face to face contact / support	4
Conflicting advice received	3
Where to go to for support	2
Other womens's experiences through Covid	1
What should pregnant women do to keep safe	1
What to bring to hospital	1

Methodology- Free text responses were sorted in to categories by key topic: how many times each topic was mentioned out of 323 responses

- Highest number responses refer to policies around **partners**, when they can attend antenatal appointments and scans, and when restrictions during during labour and on postnatal ward will be lifted.
- Some mothers who expect to be on the postnatal ward for an extended period (eg after a c-section) are concerned how they will cope without their partner with them.

“...To know no-one would make me very anxious.”

- **Where to find info-** respondents wish to make sure they always have the most up to date info, concerns that things change very rapidly and they are not always sure where to go for the latest info. A few comments made that information from different sources is conflicting
- **Procedures-** how has the general experience and routine procedures changed? What do they need to do/ what do they need to bring to hospital/ how does care through pregnancy, labour and postnatal differ from “normal times”
- Highest number of responses relating to **procedures** ask when changes from normal procedures will be relaxed / lifted
- **Postnatal care-** responses show anxiety about services being reduced, with no midwife home visits, how follow up checks for mum and baby work?

- **Antenatal appointments**- worries about not having as many checks, how do women make appointments?
- Responses specifically mentioned **masks** policy. This particular comment emphasizes how difficult this time is for women with special needs;

"I cannot imagine wearing a mask whilst dealing with labour / a newborn and seeing my husband's mouth during labour is important for me as a lip reader. I hope he won't need to wear one if he's with me"

- **Everything**- some women report they have either received no information at all- or they feel very unclear/ uninformed about the whole experience. Some of these responses show great anxiety

"Everything! Feel very unsupported during this time and this is my first child."

"Why are these things that are normally carried out not being done any more, they are obviously important and it's worrying that normal appointments aren't going ahead."

"Everything! I've said already, I've not had any advice or information about what I should be doing. No one has even advised me to eat healthily and stop alcohol- I am not daft so I've done that in any case, but your job is to advise as well as take care of our health."

"Why I have basically been left with third world care to just get on with it. I hope and pray that nothing is/goes wrong during my pregnancy"

"Everything! I am consultant led and haven't heard anything since lockdown started."

- Some responses question why Frimley Covid policies are **stricter than other Trusts**. (eg partners)
- On a positive, 28 women said they were **"all good"** happy with the info they had received, and didn't require anything further

"I feel the information frimley have updated through the Facebook has been really helpful & always up to date. They have done the best they can I believe."

"Just updates you guys are already doing a great job "

- Facebook mentioned several times in this category- several women have replied that updates and information on this platform is very good

Part 2 – Women who were still pregnant on 30th June

2.1 Demographics

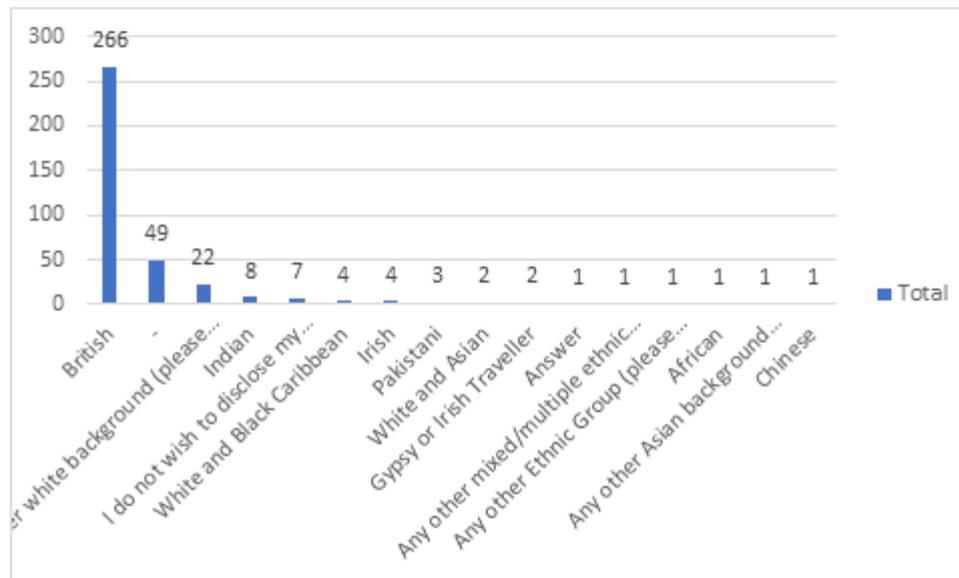
323 respondents

73% (237 women) were having care provided by Frimley staff

22% (72 women) were having care provided by Wexham staff

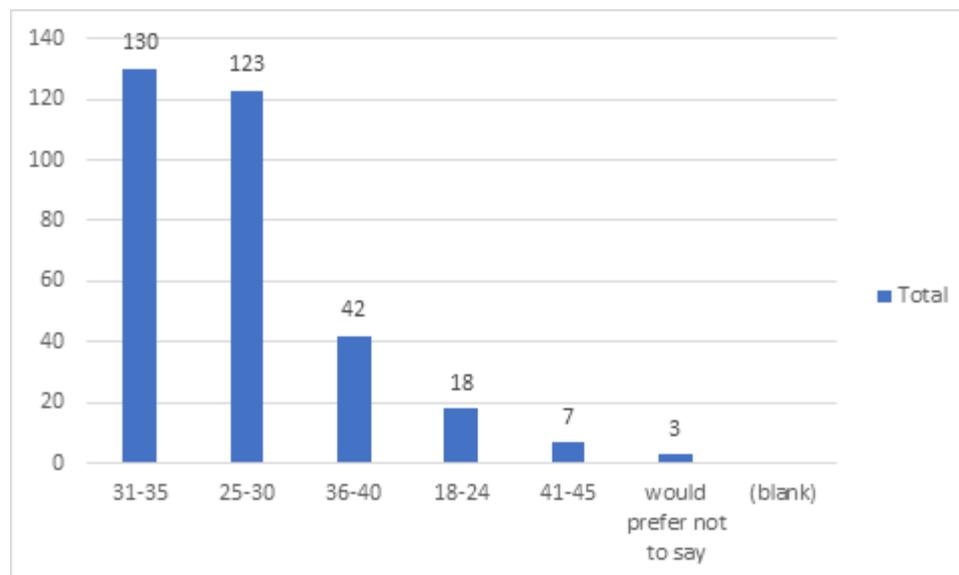
1% (2 women) were having care provided by Independent Midwives

Ethnicity



In the graph above the 266 women were White British, 49 were 'other'. Please see the appendix at the end for all the demographics questions asked.

Age



2.2 How have your preparations for birth changed because of COVID-19 (e.g. attending antenatal education classes, choice of birth partner(s) etc?

partner cant attend appointments	28
non medical services suspended	22
Plan to birth alone	19
online non medical services	17
minimal midwife / less F2F contact	16
childcare concerns/ difficulties	15
Only one birth partner	10
planning postnatal time alone	5
paid for private so partner can attend appointments	5
Difficult to access support/ info	4
More mental preparation / mental health affected	4
going it alone	3
homebirth suspended	3
telephone appointments only	3
no change	3
change hospitals	3
worried about catching covid	3
More mental preparation / mental health affected	3
change hospitals	2
opt for natural birth	1
Family cant visit to give care	1
worried about catching covid	1
planning to hypnobirth	1

Partners not attending appointments

- During pregnancy, the biggest change has been with partners not being able to attend appointments/ scans
- This is especially traumatic if there has been a previous miscarriage or this pregnancy is high risk/ with problems

Made my partner feel pushed out with appointments and also with having previous miscarriages he needed the reassurance just as much as me. The changes have just brought a whole new level of anxiety with being pregnant in this pandemic

Especially since having a miscarriage in December going to these appointments on my own are scary. However all the staff are so lovely

I had to go through a scare of no movement alone, as my husband wasn't allowed to accompany me - It was very distressing for both of us.

- Partners feel sad at missing these appointments- this is making mums anxious

Medical/ midwifery Services suspended/ or made non-F2F

- Many mentioned about non-medical services being suspended or moved online. This includes NCT, antenatal, yoga. This made women feel they missed out on part of the experience, and they are missing out on making friends and forming a support group with other mums
- Midwife appointments have become fewer for some, and made either online or over the phone. Women miss the face to face element, and a few feel that this increases risk to their unborn baby (causing anxiety)

I understood that these changes were introduced for the safety of mothers and babies and they were well communicated in advance on Facebook.

I did feel that not much information was offered at doctors' appointments about the changes though or the mental health aspect of these changes weren't addressed.

Suspension of services made me very anxious and worried. Took away some of the excitement and made me worry how I could look after our new born after having a c section and no husband being there to help. Added more stress which isn't good when you're pregnant. Also hard dealing with a new born and only hearing from midwives and HV over phone.

Women mentally preparing to be alone during birth

- Because of changing rules on whether a partner can be with you during the birth, many women are mentally preparing and planning to give birth completely alone- so they are prepared for worst case scenario
- Women are also preparing to be alone in the antenatal and postnatal wards, and to be alone during the first stages of labour
- Some dads who have responded are concerned they will not be able to bond with the baby because they will miss out on parts of the birth

My partner hasn't been to any of my appointments with me and I may have to go through the first stages of labour alone which is causing me huge anxiety after a previous traumatic birth.

thought of being left alone in hospital with a newborn is scary

Seriously worried I cannot be there for the birth of our child, or no being able to have the right bonding time after.

Childcare concerns

- Concerns over planning for childcare during the birth is causing anxiety for some. They do not know who can look after kids because of lockdown measures. They think their partner will need to miss the birth to look after children instead

There is a chance my husband won't be able to be with me for birth as he needs to look after my little girl

Perceived risk of partner missing birth

- Since fathers/ birth partners are only allowed in at the later stage of labour, women are worried they will not get there on time

realisation that if I have another quick labour my husband will miss the birth of his child.

2.3 How have these changes made you feel?

Methodology: analysis of free text, with common feelings/ terms sorted in to categories

- Anxiety is the feeling that is most mentioned, followed by sad (or a combination of both)

Worries about reduced face to face appointments

- Women are worried that the reduction in face to face time is a risk to their baby

Uneasy, like I have not been monitored closely. I had my first growth scan at 34 weeks which has raised concerns and now I have been diagnosed with gestational diabetes

Feel very little checks have been done to check my baby is alive

I was really scared to come for my scan, I cried for weeks before. I have since been quite a few times and my anxiety has been reduced.

Prospect of Loneliness / time alone

- Women are anxious and worried about how difficult it will be when they are alone for more of the time

feel very anxious at the prospect of having to give birth with limited support from my partner. After having my daughter I was in a lot of pain and struggled to move and so relied on him and my mum to help with my daughter.

Worried about how I will cope alone. Depressed I won't have the normal birth experience.

- A lot of women report feeling very out of control of their pregnancy and this in turn is causing anxiety
- Dads/ partners are also very anxious:

Horrendous to be honest. The thought of not seeing my wife and twins until they are ready to come home is sickening. Not be able to be there for scans is bad enough, but not being able to help my wife after and be there for them is ridiculous. Really seems to me that frimley have completely forgotten about the mental health of mums and birth partners. Something needs to change. I was there when my son was born and the 3 days they were in hospital after. I was there to help, the thought of not being there for them does not sit well at all.

I'm OK knowing that I can contact them if needed. I'm keeping my phone appointments and recognise the need for safety. I'm also vulnerable because of underlying lung issues. Sad and disappointed that my wife could not and may not attend the scans. This is her first pregnancy (I'm carrying, she has endometriosis and has not been able to carry beyond the first trimester)

- There is so much sadness coming through- women feeling like they are missing out on their experience.

These changes have made me feel overwhelmed, unprepared, worried. I feel like something that should be very special, just isn't because of the amount of worry.

Depressed I won't have the normal birth experience.

- Many women are going through the pregnancy constantly worried that they will be on their own during labour

2.4 Which NHS service changes have affected you?

27. Some NHS services in the trust have had to change or be withdrawn due to COVID-19. Which of these changes have directly affected you? Create Chart

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Tour of the unit unavailable		33.44%	108
2	Virtual appointments		32.51%	105
3	Appointments in hubs		17.34%	56
4	No cervical sweeps		7.74%	25
5	No post dates clinic		2.79%	9
6	Homebirth service suspended		15.79%	51
7	No partners at scans		91.02%	294
8	No partners at appointments		89.16%	288
9	Only one birth partner allowed		26.93%	87
10	No birth partners in the hospital until admitted to labour ward or birth centre in active labour		53.25%	172
11	No partners on postnatal ward		40.87%	132

- Overwhelmingly the free text responses talk about how difficult attending appointments alone is

I feel like I've been 'robbed' of a positive birthing experience before I've even given birth

Very upset and frustrated. My partner doesn't feel involved with his baby at all and I'm worried that it will affect him bonding with baby once baby is born

Scared. Particularly about being alone on the postnatal ward with a new baby and being in pain.

Really upset. I know it's not the hospital's fault but if I'd known a pandemic was coming I wouldn't have chosen to be pregnant through it

- Many women say they understand reasons for these changes to services

Again safe as this is a precaution designed to help myself and baby

Disappointed and upset as even though I understand the reasons I did not find out my partner wasn't allowed in the scan until we arrived.

For comparison- these are the responses given to the same question asked to mums who have actually given birth. No partners on postnatal ward, and "no post dates" clinic feature more often

11. Some NHS services in the trust have had to change or be withdrawn due to COVID-19. Which of these changes have directly affected you? 

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Tour of the unit unavailable	27.92%	67
2	Virtual appointments	22.50%	54
3	Appointments in hubs	37.92%	91
4	No cervical sweeps	17.92%	43
5	No post dates clinic	25.42%	61
6	Homebirth service suspended	12.50%	30
7	No partners at scans	52.92%	127
8	No partners at appointments	71.25%	171
9	Only one birth partner allowed	41.67%	100
10	No birth partners in hospital until admitted to labour ward or birth centre in active labour	74.17%	178
11	No partners on postnatal ward	73.75%	177
12	Other (please specify): <input type="button" value="View"/>	9.58%	23

It is important to say that most negative feedback from pregnant mums is directed at the situation, not the staff or the hospitals.

Many mums and mums-to-be said that whilst they are disappointed and sad about the situation, they understand why it has to be like this

Part 3 – Women who gave birth between 1st March 2020 and 30th June 2020

3.1 Demographics

240 responses

68% (164 women) gave birth at Frimley Park

28% (66 women) gave birth at Wexham Park

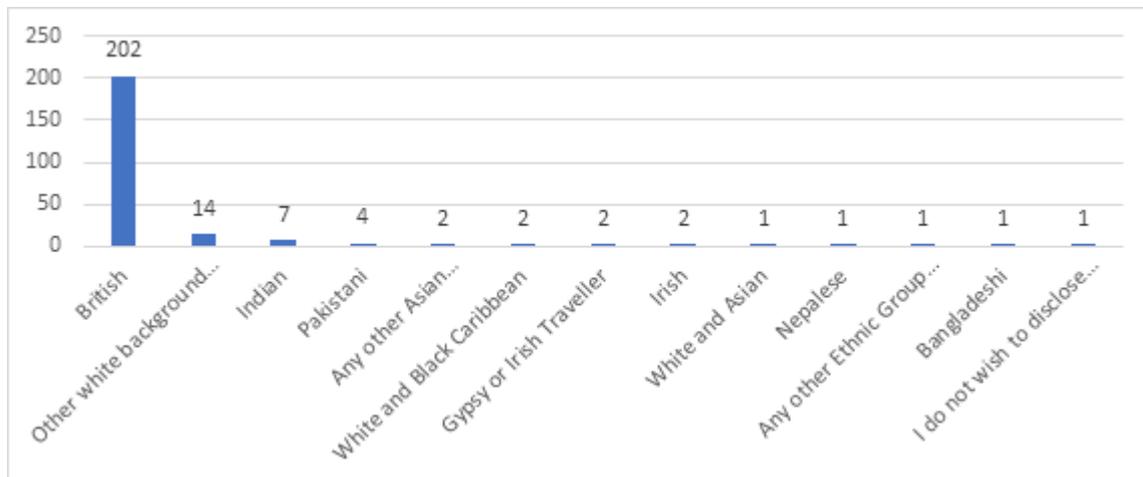
1% (2 women) had homebirths with Frimley midwives

1% (2 women) had homebirths with Independent Midwives

1 woman had an unplanned homebirth attended by paramedics

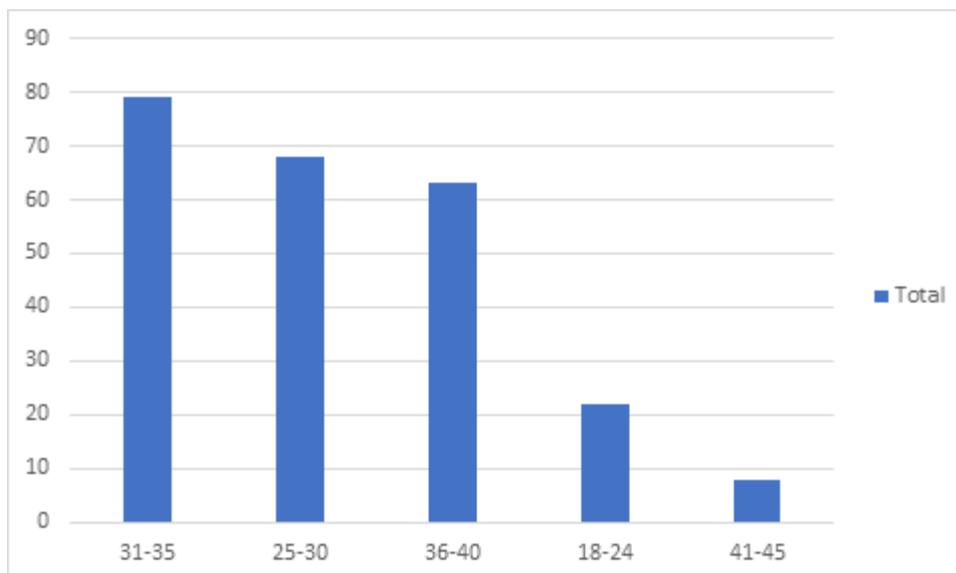
1 women give birth on the antenatal ward at Frimley Park

Ethnicity



In the graph above 202 respondents were White British

Age



3.2 What effect did COVID-19 have on your plans for birth?

None	50
Number of birth partners	24
No partner until active labour	23
Mulberry Suite unavailable	22
Increased anxiety	16
Partner restrictions	14
No partner on post natal ward	13
No partner at induction	10
Birthplan affected	9
Homebirth not supported	7
Minor changes	7
None- c section	6
Childcare problems	5
Hired independent midwife	4
Partner missed birth	3
Partner present for c-section only	3
how it made me feel	3
Less support	1
Changed hospitals	1
Take more things to hospital	1
No visitors	1
partner nearly missed birth	1
Lack of emotional support	1
Lack of choice	1
Delayed access to pain relief	1
Delayed cesaerian	1
Family not able to visit	1

Number of birth partners

- 10% of responses said their plans were affected by restriction on the number of birth partners. Several women were upset that their mums could not be present, or they had to choose between their mum and the baby's father to be present

My mom couldn't be with me..she had been with us for our boys and my dad was always waiting in hospital. For them not to be with me broke my heart. Not having my husband at induction was distressing and i really didn't like it.

- Several women were concerned the baby's father or their birth partner would not make it to the birth in time because they could only be called in during active labour.
- Planning for the baby's father / birth partner only be present during active labour increased anxiety during pregnancy because women knew they would be alone for a lot of the experience

Mulberry Suite / homebirth unavailable

- Many women disappointed that plans to use the Mulberry Suite and homebirths were affected. However in the end several mums commented that they had a positive experience in the labour ward.

Just the change of giving birth is mulberry suite but the midwives were still amazing and midwife lead

I was on labour ward instead but it was just as nice as the mulberry centre would have been

Really wanted a home birth but the hospital was fantastic

Restrictions for partners

- Planning ahead due to known partner restrictions increased anxiety during the pregnancy, some mums commented that they felt sad or that it was unfair that the babies' dad would miss out on a lot of the experience.
- Some felt their support would be affected, both during the birth and on the postnatal ward

I wanted my husband with me the entire time, only because I was a first time mum and wanted him there to help, support and make any decisions necessary for me.

My husband couldn't be with me on antenatal and postnatal ward. We were always going to be induced and use labour ward due to being a high risk pregnancy

Childcare concerns

- Concerns over plans for childcare caused anxiety- due to lockdown restrictions, many mums had worried through their pregnancy that baby's dad would have to miss the birth to look after older children

Had to break lockdown to get childcare for children (but apparently that's fine but only knew in hindsight).

3.3 What effect did COVID-19 have when you actually gave birth?

none	52
alone on postnatal ward	33
Partner not staying long after birth	22
Alone a lot of the time	18
Staff wearing PPE	13
alone during induction	11
Partner nearly missed birth	8
Partner only present for active labour	7
Not having support of partner on postnatal ward	7
Partner missed birth	6
Difficulty getting to ward	4
rushed out of hospital	4
No partner until active labour	4
quicker discharge	4
no visitors after birth	4
taken in to isolation due to covid test result	3
made choices to assure quick discharge	2
partner unable to bond with baby	2
couldn't have homebirth	2
everything more difficult	2
shortage of midwives	1
hired independent midwife	1
mums on ward more supportive	1
No skin to skin	1
great experience	1
couldn't have a waterbirth	1
lack of choice	1
more anxious	1
waiting for help a long time	1
not allowed to leave room	1
gave birth at home with no medical attendance	1
only one partner	1
scared	1
Covid test	1
social distancing	1
delayed coming in to hospital	1
struggled with bonding	1
brought date forward	1
Unplanned homebirth- sent home twice	1
Mulberry suite unavailable	1
worried about eating food	1
mentally and emotionally hard	1
conflicting advice on pool availability	1
partner traumatised	1

Note: Filtering by age or ethnicity did not change how women felt about the changes to their birth (same responses came top)

Partner restrictions

- Highest number of responses related to mums not having the baby's father/ birth partner on the postnatal ward- or commented that they were alone without their partner a lot of the time during the whole experience. Some women were in hospital for several days without support from their loved ones or any visits
- Many mums used this question to express how being alone during induction and on the postnatal ward would affect or did affect them. Mums had to plan how they would cope "alone" during this time without this extra support

I was alone on induction ward with no real support from anyone during about 9hours of painful labour pain. I was told I needed to be transferred to labour ward but there was no space so I had to wait, fearing the worst that I would give birth in a cubical on my own. I was eventually transferred to labour ward and my partner joined me but I only had two hours left of my labour. I had no offer of pain relief until the last moments of my labour and I felt lonely at my most vulnerable point. This was my first pregnancy and I was scared.

My partner had to leave hospital a couple hours after I had given birth & I didn't see him or any other relatives including my son, until we were discharged from hospital (5 days after birth - 7 days in all)

- Women reported that this was a very lonely time for them
- Having no partner on the postnatal ward was especially difficult for mums who had caesareans, since they were there longer, and felt more support from their partners would have helped

I couldn't have any visitors and I had to stay in for 3 days after so was very lonely and difficult

Still struggling to get over being left at the postnatal ward. Those first hours and days, when physically unable to care for my son and relying on people I didn't know for was horrible.

- Women were upset that the baby's father could not spend time with their child at all for the first few days

My partner couldn't help me in postnatal and couldn't support us or be a part of his baby's first few days of life as we we're admitted for jaundice.

- A few women said even a visit of 1 hour per day would have made a difference

I understand why it was necessary for the changes but feel the birth partner should have been allowed to visit the postnatal ward even if it was for only 1 hour a day. I feel like this would have made a high difference to my recovery

- Being alone during the induction process was also difficult for many women. It was a lonely and anxious period.

Had 30 hour induction alone and then 5 day's in hospital alone with a newborn on a very busy postnatal ward. Having suffered a bad haemorrhage during birth, i really could have done with my husband being around during my stay.

Partner missing/ nearly missing the birth

- Several women reported that their partner nearly missed the birth, 6 dads actually missed the birth because they could only be asked to come in when active labour started, and some births progressed quickly.

My husband just made the birth by 20 minutes due to not being allowed in until I was in active labour

Was really worried that they wouldn't let me contact my partner with enough time to get to the hospital.

Caused a lot of anxiety and worry that we would be left in hospital without my Husband,

Labouring on my own was incredibly difficult

it was an emergency delivery so not all went to plan anyway but my partner missed birth and we didn't get to meet our daughter together until she was 4 days old.

Difficulty getting to the wards

- Some women said that because their partners were not allowed in the hospital, they had to carry their belongings in to or from the hospital whilst in labour and in pain and it was very difficult getting to the ward

I was 9cm when I got to hospital and my husband couldn't come in until I was assessed. I couldn't walk into the hospital but luckily a stranger that worked at the hospital found a wheelchair and rushed me to the ward.

Was alone to begin with which set me up wrong for giving birth because I was walking through a deserted hospital, in the middle of the night, alone and in pain.

When I was discharged I felt bad that the midwives had to help me carry the bags and car seat to the door. As I had a caesarean I was unable to carry anything heavy.

Restrictions forcing mum to make tough decisions

- Some women made "medical" decisions due to Covid measures in place
 - o One couple were so disappointed homebirths were suspended, they decided to stay at home and birth alone without a midwife present, paramedics and ambulance was needed, but OK outcome.
 - o Some mums delayed going in to hospital until much later than they would normally, since they were worried about birthing alone

This question was used to give positive accounts as well!

- A few women appreciated the relaxing postnatal time with no visitors

Then I had a lovely relaxing day on the postnatal ward. I loved having no visitors and just being able to rest, feed and bond with my baby

- Many women mentioned that whilst the situation was not as they had hoped for, the midwives and other staff were amazing

I wasn't able to have my husband when I was induced and did not have him until the following day. However I have to say that all the midwives were amazing and somehow filled in the gap of his absence.

Although prior to giving birth everything felt that was falling apart all my plans and dreams had been wiped out. However Frimley staff did not make it feel that there was a big change each one of them went the extra mile for us and personally I can't thank them enough for being there for me, supporting me and supporting my husband when he was able to arrive and delivering my baby safely.

I was anxious but the care received made you feel better and safe

3.4 How did you feel about these changes?

Methodology: Count of key words used in free text responses to describe the process- in green are positive responses

sad	47
anxious	18
upset	15
ok	14
Understood need for change but didn't like it	11
partner was more upset	6
scared	5
unsupported	5
fine	4
midwives made up for it	4
disappointed but I understood	3
midwives put me at ease	3
Nervous	3
safe than sorry	2
Happy ending	2
worried	2
lucky	2
worried at first, then ok	2
mental health affected	2
upset, frustrated	1
better with partners support	1
Awful	1
devastated, mournful, unsupported, forgotten	1
team were brilliant	1
did not feel real	1
depressed, low mood	1
disappointed	1
sad, lonely	1
alone, uncared for	1
should not have to go it alone	1
Disappointed, lonely, sad	1
unhappy that private midwife had to be hired	1
disgusted	1
vulnerable	1
distressed	1
positive experience	1
duck out of water	1
sad, alone	1
emotional, anxious	1
sad, upset	1
exhausted	1
scared at first	1
felt like an afterthought	1
stressed	1

Firstly, it should be said that very few of the negative feelings experienced were directed at the hospitals and or staff. Mums (and dads) were mostly upset about the situation they have found themselves in, rather than the services they received

- Lots of negative words used with many women feeling sad, anxious and upset being the most common feelings expressed. Increased anxiety was mentioned the most- some mums were worried about the effect this had on the baby.
- Several women felt Covid had robbed them of the experience and the excitement had been taken away

I can't get that time back and i'm struggling to make it up now.

It's taken so many special moments away from us.

My midwife told me I was so anxious my body wasn't allowing labour to progress

- Interestingly, several women were feeling most worried about how the measures were affecting their partner, several said their partners were more upset than they were- a few mentioned fathers were traumatized and experienced trouble bonding with their new baby

Upset and disappointed. Much worse for partner as he had to come home to an empty home as unable to see family or friends.

Many positive accounts of how mums felt

I felt okay about this as the midwives were soooo friendly and smiled with their eyes to make up for not being able to see faces

From the hospital perspective Wexham were just incredible and my birthing experience was great.

Proud of myself and the other ladies doing it solo on postnatal: women are strong! And actually loved my little mum and bub bubble. Impressed by the amazing care given by midwives and nurses who stepped in.

When put in isolation I was quite scared that night but focused on enjoying my baby and the staff in the morning made me feel really safe and reassured. The staff at wexham were amazing

Was worried but had a lovely midwife Abbey who came with me and took pictures for me when my son was born

midwives made up for it

Part 4 – Impact of Covid-19 on feeding

This final section asked women about how the pandemic has affected how they have fed their babies.

4.1 What were your plans to feed your baby and how did your plans change due to COVID-19?

- We have 240 completed responses and of this almost 70% of mums when initially discovering they were pregnant planned to breastfeed, 14% planned formula feeding and 13% planned mixed feeding.
- After the birth, 26% of the same group said they changed how they fed their babies due to the support that was either available or unavailable due to COVID-19

18. When you were pregnant, how did you plan to feed your baby?			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Breast		69.17%	166
2	Formula		13.75%	33
3	Mixed (breast and formula)		13.33%	32
4	Undecided		3.75%	9
			answered	240
			skipped	381

19. After your baby was born did you change how you fed your baby because of the support that was available or unavailable due to COVID-19?			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		25.83%	62
2	No		74.17%	178
			answered	240
			skipped	381

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20. Please tell us what changes you made and why. How did it make you feel?

- A quarter of respondents said they changed their original plan for feeding their baby.
 - Analysis of Q20 Please tell us what changes you made and why. How did it make you feel?
 - Majority changed from breast to bottle.
 - Many responses make for sad reading. Many women wanted to continue breastfeeding. They felt they had no choice but to change how they feed their baby, because they could not access support, or the right support for them
 - A lot of detail was included by many women- they clearly feel passionate about the changes they have made. Many appear affected by their experiences
- "I was quite fragile so after my birth plan had gone completely wrong I didn't want to feel like my body may fail at another thing"*
- Women reported feeling unsupported, disappointed, sad, guilty, mental health suffered, some felt pressurized to change feeding methods before they were ready

- Key reasons given for changing how mums feed their babies- and how doing this made women feel have been extracted and sorted in to categories

4.2 What influenced your feeding decision?

bottle	3
easier as mum of two	1
no advice given	1
Special care	1
Breast	1
Amazing support	1
breast to expressed	2
telephone advice not helpful	1
Tiredness	1
breast to formula	36
advice after hospital didn't feel safe	1
Baby wouldn't latch	5
Complications with labour	1
Couldn't get hang of feeding	1
Cracked nipples	1
difficulty accessing support during c section recovery	1
Latch issues, pain	1
Latch issues, tongue tie, pain	1
Mental health, lack of support	1
no BF clinic	3
no BF clinic- lots of phone consultations, inconsistent advice	1
no clinics	1
no clinics or drop ins. Baby didn't gain weight	1
No F2F support	5
No one to ask advice from	1
No partner on ward, bad experience with a feeding specialist on the ward	1
no support	1
No support on postnatal ward but fantastic at home	1
Not enough support	1
Pain, depression and milk supply drying up	1
Poor support	1
telephone advice not helpful	1
Tongue tie	1
Tongue tie- no time to express	1
Unsure if baby was gaining weight- no weighing clinic	1
wanted to go home as quick as possible as no partner allowed on ward	1
Breast to mixed	12
Baby didn't gain weight	2
Developed thrush, in pain, no family or professional support	1
Difficulties breast feeding	1

Hungry baby	1
Hungry baby- worried baby might end up in hospital	1
Jaundice and staff availability	1
Meds due to PND	1
Mixed messages received after medical issues experienced	1
No professional support	1
over tired	1
Tongue tie	1
formula to breast	1
Midwife showed how to breastfeed	1

4.3 How did it make you feel?

bottle	1
No confidence	1
Breast	1
Amazing	1
breast to expressed	2
Unsupported	2
breast to formula	28
concerned	1
Confused	1
Destroyed confidence	1
Devastated	1
Difficult decision	1
Doubting myself	1
Found it hard	1
Guilt and sadness	1
Midwives weren't helpful	1
Put mind at rest	1
Sad but acceptance	1
Struggled	2
Unsupported	15
Breast to mixed	10
angry, sad, Let down	1
Confused	1
Unsupported	5
Unsupported, stressed	1
Upset and disappointed	1
Worried	1

- Overwhelmingly women cited lack of support once home- in particular face to face support. Clinics closed, no face to face help available.

"I wanted to breastfeed my baby and they taught me how to in the hospital for the two days I stayed. But when I got home I needed more support which I did not get as I could only reach them through video/phone which isnt the same as in person."

"Breastfeeding was very hard and stressful baby has jaundice and weight loss so needed to top up but after getting mastitis and very poor supply moved to formula, although I had some support the lack of hands on/ face to face support impacted my ability. Felt lots of guilt and sadness about not being able to breastfeed"

"My baby struggled to latch and we were readmitted to hospital during the first week because of this. I was discharged with a plan to keep trying to breastfeed, express and give formula top up. Unfortunately I found that I didn't have as much support when I was discharged from hospital and felt really down that I couldn't breastfeed which ultimately led to many tears and the decision to exclusively formula feed. However with support from home I accepted that I had done my best and as long as baby was happy and being fed and loved then that was the most important thing"

No home visits - I struggle and continue to struggle breastfeeding and I had to go and visit the midwives every 2-3 days instead of getting a visit. I had to walk three days after a c-section half a mile for the first appointment in pain because we haven't got a car. I don't feel I've had the postpartum care I should have received

I feel I've had less support in community. The hospital were amazing though

- A number of women reported they had received phone support, but where mentioned most reported it wasn't effective in place of face to face.

I was planning to breast feed but with the lack of face to face appts meant I was unable to continue. I had trouble and although I spoke to people on the phone I just couldn't get it. A face to face practice would have been everything

- A few were unhappy with support received from hospital staff. Some felt pressure to switch to a formula before they were ready

feeding midwife who actually told me to have a break from it and try to use nipple shields. This had meant I had to introduce my baby to bottles and formula which was a very difficult decision to make

Baby was getting stressed about breast feeding as couldn't latch properly. Midwives weren't very helpful.

All of the other midwives were great at trying to help, but one lady (supposedly a breast feeding expert) was so rude and abrupt with me that after one encounter with her I was so upset that I gave up trying to breast feed and switched to bottle. She made me feel like an idiot who didn't know what I was doing and practically shouted at me

I didn't get much help and support from midwives in postnatal ward in regards to helping my baby latch to the breast, or how to express properly

She destroyed my confidence.

I formula fed because I felt like I wasn't given enough support on the postnatal ward and the damage was done. However the support once I was home was fantastic

- Ladies in severe pain felt switching to bottle was their only option

"It become too painful to carry on."

"At 2 weeks I had to give up breastfeeding due to poor latch leading to horrendous pain with bleeding nipples and mastitis and thrush. No access to see anybody for help."

- Lack of partners in hospital meant less support when on the ward- too tired to breastfeed
- Worryingly, anxiety lead to a few women making pre-emptive changes to how they feed their baby;

"Gave baby top ups and regular formula feeds as I didn't want to risk the baby could lose weight and end up in hospital"

"I struggled a lot and found it difficult to get support got breastfeeding and also couldn't attend weighing clinic so was unsure if he was gaining weight."

- But some positive accounts were given

I just formula fed but my midwife has been able to since show me how to breastfeed

I decided to breast feed the support from the midwives and health visitors was brilliant I'd never breast fed before and quickly got the help I needed even in lock down I can't fault the help and support I've had its been amazing.

Part 5 Summary

- There is a lot of praise and hardly any criticism of staff. This MUST be emphasized!!!
- Clear, easy to find and up to date information is really important and does a lot to help put families minds at rest. Social media is a popular channel for mums to get latest information so this needs to be kept current
- Responses from pregnant women are more negative compared with women who have given birth- it could be interpreted that this is because everything being unknown/ uncertain during pregnancy and women were planning for/ expecting the worst, and actually it wasn't as bad as they had thought!. Either way the survey shows a huge amount of anxiety and fear amongst pregnant women which has been very sad to read
- The main worry for women relates to restrictions on partners bring present- and not only at the birth
- Absence of partners at antenatal appointments is very hard for mothers and partners alike
- The induction process and time on the postnatal ward can be a very lonely and scary time when mums have to be on their own. - If partners could spend even a very small amount of time spent on antenatal and postnatal wards, responses suggest this could improve the experience for the whole family
- Mums (and partners) are worried that the restrictions will impact their ability to bond with their baby. A few mums say their partners did indeed experienced this after the birth
- Mums need reassurance that their partner will be called in time for them to arrive for the birth, this can be worry carrying through the whole pregnancy
- Mums find it very difficult to get to the ward on their own when in labour- they need help
- Dads/ partners feelings must also be considered, they are also finding this a very traumatic time. They are very worried for their family, sad to be missing out on much of the whole 9mths experience, and upset they are not there to support at the most important time. Consideration of the baby's fathers' feelings in turn is cause additional worry for mums
- Clarification could be given to families regarding government lockdown rules relating to childcare. This caused a lot of anxiety though the pregnancy
- Lack of access to feeding support- in particular face to face support during the pandemic has lead to many mothers feeling forced to switch to formula feeding before they feel ready.
- This has lead to widespread feelings of guilt, disappointment and sadness amongst mothers. What risk factors are there with F2F breastfeeding support? Can appropriate use of PPE help mitigate risk? Do risks always outweigh the need for F2F support?

Whilst many of the concerns highlighted in this report have now been resolved, many families are concerned about how things will change if COVID cases increase resulting in stricter local lockdowns. We hope that the information in this report will be able to help inform staff making future plans so that minimal distress to families occurs in this situation.

APPENDIX

Demographic questions asked

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-30
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 45+
- Would prefer not to say

Are you

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

What is your ethnic group

White

- British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Other white background (please describe in the comment box below)

Asian

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Nepalese
- British
- Any other Asian background (please describe in the comment box below)

Black

- Caribbean
- African
- British
- Any other Black background (please describe in the comment box below)

Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Asian background (please describe in the comment box below)

Any other Ethnic Group (please describe in the comment box below)

I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin.