

# How to Choose a Maternity Care Provider

Choosing a maternity care provider is an important personal decision to make as you begin your pregnancy and parenting journey. Learning about your options will help you and your family get the care that best fits your needs. Some things that will affect your decision are: **your health, your values, your preferences and what services and supports are available in your community.**

## Getting Started

Almost all **Family Physicians (FPs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) can provide care in early pregnancy.** Your current FP or NP may offer pregnancy care until mid or late pregnancy. However, at some point in your pregnancy, **you will need to start care with one of the maternity providers listed below.** Making this decision early will help ensure they are available. If serious complications arise along the way your maternity provider can refer you to an OB who will be added to your care team. At about 6 weeks after the birth, care for you and your newborn will transfer back to your usual FP or NP. If you do not have a FP or NP, you can ask your maternity provider for guidance.

## Understanding Your Options

Most communities will have a group of FPs that have special interest and expertise in maternity (FPM). These FPMs are an excellent choice for your maternity care. Not only are they experienced in pregnancy, birth and newborn care they also have the knowledge and skills for general medical care across all ages and conditions. Family Physicians are well connected in their communities and help you get access to other services and to see specialists, when needed. There are some other options for maternity care.

In BC you can choose one of the following professionals to be your main (or primary) Maternity Provider:



### Family Physician with a Maternity Special Interest (FPM)

- Family doctor (sometimes called a “GP” or General Practitioner) with expertise in general medicine and additional skills and knowledge in pregnancy, birth and newborn care.
- No referral is needed.
- Found in almost all communities.
- May be able to offer ongoing care to families (if there is space in their practice).



### Registered Midwife (RM)

- Independent practitioner trained to care for healthy uncomplicated pregnancy, birth and newborns.
- No referral is needed.
- Available in many, but not all communities.

### Obstetrician (OB)



- Specialist doctor with surgical skills who generally cares for people with complicated conditions in pregnancy and birth (such as twins, breech position and serious medical disorders). Also offers specialty care in Gynecology.
- Referral from a Family Physician, Nurse Practitioner or Registered Midwife is needed.
- Some OBs offer care for healthy uncomplicated pregnancies (for example in Vancouver and Victoria).



**Note:** The BC Medical Services Plan covers the services of FPMs, RMs, and OBs, other specialist physicians, and your care in hospital. All providers work with a team of health care professionals such as nurses, educators, doulas, counsellors, physiotherapists and others to give you and your baby all the care that you need. Some of these extra services are not covered by the BC Medical Services Plan.

Depending on where you live, some of the providers above work together in the following ways:

- **Interdisciplinary (mixed) Teams** - A group of RMs and FPMs who work closely together to provide maternity care as a team along with some other health professionals.
- **Connecting Pregnancy or Group Prenatal Care** – A program offered by FPMs and/or RMs. In a small group with other pregnant people/couples, you and your partner/support person would receive prenatal education at the same visit as your usual pregnancy care. People in Connecting Pregnancy groups often continue to support one another well beyond the pregnancy and birth. Check if a program like this is available in your community.

## Similarities and Differences Among Maternity Providers

All licensed maternity providers listed below provide excellent care for pregnancy and birth. There are some differences in the services they offer depending on their training, skills, and practice.

	Family Physician with Maternity Special Interest (FPM)	Registered Midwife (RM)	Obstetrician (OB)
<b>Medical care to prepare for pregnancy (preconception)</b>	Yes provided	<b>Not provided</b>	Yes provided
<b>Start of pregnancy care (prenatal)</b>	Begins with a positive pregnancy test. <b>May provide medical care for other concerns during pregnancy.</b>	Usually begins at 6 weeks but can begin as early as a positive pregnancy test.	Begins at <b>about 20 weeks or earlier for complicated pregnancies as needed.</b>
<b>Pregnancy loss or problems with getting pregnant (infertility)</b>	Yes. Pregnancy loss care and <b>early infertility care</b>	Pregnancy loss care <b>after registering</b> in the practice, yes.	Yes. Pregnancy loss care, <b>especially multiple losses (with referral). Infertility diagnosis/ treatment and other problems.</b>
<b>Labour and birth care</b>	Yes. <b>Care for most medical conditions provided.</b>	Yes. <b>Home births may be available</b> , depending on the pregnancy and the community.	Yes. <b>Care for surgical and most medical conditions provided.</b> Care often shared with FPMs or RMs on referral.
<b>After birth care (postpartum)</b>	Yes. To 6 weeks or <b>longer in special circumstances.</b> Care of partners and other children is sometimes available.	Yes. To 6 weeks or longer in special circumstances. <b>Home visits are often available for the first 2 weeks.</b>	Yes. To 6 weeks. <b>Routinely only 1 visit at 6 weeks.</b> More visits available if needed for complications.
<b>Breast/chest infant feeding</b>	Yes. Some FPMs are certified Lactation Consultants. <b>Some FPs provide care for complicated BF problems.</b>	Yes. Some RMs are certified Lactation Consultants.	<b>No.</b> Breastfeeding care is usually provided by public health nurses.
<b>Newborn care</b>	Yes. To 6 weeks (or more in special circumstances). Sometimes, may continue care of the newborn and/or other family members.	Yes. To 6 weeks (or more in special circumstances).	<b>No.</b> Referred to a Pediatrician, FP, or RM up to 6 weeks.
<b>Visits</b>	Online or in-person at clinic and hospital. Sometimes home visits are available, and occasionally an FPM will be involved in a home birth.	Online or in-person at clinic and hospital. <b>Appointments can be longer than with physicians and home visits are more available.</b>	Online or in-person at clinic and hospital. No visits at home.
<b>How the schedule for births is covered (on-call groups)</b>	Groups made up of 4-12 FPMs. <b>A few FPMs provide most of the on-call care for their practice.</b> Some practices have FPM/RM that share coverage.	Groups made up of 1-4 RMs in most practices. Some practices have a larger number. Some practices have FPM/RM shared care.	Groups made up of only OBs, ranging from 1 or 2 in smaller communities, up to 18 in Vancouver.



### TIPS TO HELP YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION

- Think about what matters to you and your family and what kind of expert or style of practice you prefer.
- Check provider/team websites and see what services they offer. Does their approach and beliefs about pregnancy, labour and birth fit with what you think is important?
- Find out what services are available in your community, including where you can plan to give birth.
- Ask your family, friends and elders for advice or recommendations.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### 1 What should I do to prepare for pregnancy?

All Family Physicians (FPs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) can help you prepare for pregnancy. It is helpful to book an appointment for personal health advice, ideally 3 months before starting to try to get pregnant.

Check out HealthLinkBC's Planning Your Pregnancy:

[www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/planning-your-pregnancy](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/planning-your-pregnancy)

### 2 Where do I go when I first know I am pregnant?

Make an appointment with an FP, NP or RM as soon as possible. They will ask you some questions to check on your health and offer you blood tests and an early ultrasound to confirm your due date. They can give you information about the maternity providers available in your area to help you choose.

### 3 Can I see both a Registered Midwife (RM) and a Family Physician-with maternity special interest (FPM)?

No. Generally, you must choose either an RM or an FPM, since they are independent practitioners who offer complete care for your pregnancy, birth, newborn and postpartum, unless when RMs and FPMs share care as a team (as in some communities).

### 4 Can I choose to see a specialist Obstetrician (OB)?

Most OBs only care for complicated pregnancy and birth. However, some OBs will also offer care to people with an uncomplicated pregnancy. You need a referral from an FP, NP or RMW. OBs do not provide newborn care or breast/chest feeding advice and will refer you to another practitioner.

## 5 What services are covered on the BC Medical Services Plan (MSP)?

MSP covers care given by an FP, NP, RM, OB, pediatrician and other specialists, plus all hospital care for mother and newborn. Services that are NOT covered by MSP include: doula care, prenatal education classes, physiotherapy, massage, counseling and most nutrition counselling. Note: The Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program (DAFGP) covers the costs of doula care for Aboriginal families. <https://bcaafc.com/dafgp/>

## 6 How can I find out about what providers are available in my community?

Visit the Resources links listed below. Ask your FP, NP, Public Health Nurse, family and friends.

### PROVINCIAL RESOURCES

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Click on the links below OR copy the URL:

**Online directory:** Pathways Medical Directory - [www.pathwaysmedicalcare.ca](http://www.pathwaysmedicalcare.ca)

**Online directory:** Finding a Midwife - [www.bcmidwives.com](http://www.bcmidwives.com)

### RESOURCES IN THE VANCOUVER AREA

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Click on the links below OR copy the URL:

#### Online directory:

- Finding a Maternity Care Doctor in Vancouver: [www.pregnancyvancouver.ca](http://www.pregnancyvancouver.ca)
- Midwives Vancouver: [www.midwivesinvancouver.ca](http://www.midwivesinvancouver.ca)
- OB/Group: [www.obgroup.ca](http://www.obgroup.ca)

#### Maternity Groups or Clinics:

- Family Practice Maternity Service at BC Women's: [www.birthdocs.ca](http://www.birthdocs.ca)
- Terra Maternity Group (for births at BC Women's): [www.terramaternity.ca](http://www.terramaternity.ca)
- Maternity Care Clinic at St. Paul's Hospital: St. Paul's Maternity Care: [www.stpaulsmaternity.ca](http://www.stpaulsmaternity.ca)
- Maternity Care Clinic in South Vancouver (for births at BC Women's): South Community Birth Program: [www.scbp.ca](http://www.scbp.ca)