

Taking your placenta home

Patient information

If you would like to take your placenta home, in most cases it is fine to do so, as long as you agree to follow the basic health precautions which are explained below.

All placentas are routinely kept refrigerated in Birth Suite at University Hospital Geelong for the first 24 hours after the birth of the baby. As placentas can tell us a lot about the health and wellbeing of the mum and baby, keeping your placenta in the birth suite for 24 hours gives us the opportunity to send it to pathology for testing if needed. Sometimes the placenta will need to go to pathology straight after the birth of your baby for examination, which means that you may not be able to take it home, or that you will need to collect it after the examination is completed. In these cases, it may sometimes be necessary to freeze your placenta after 24 hours to prevent deterioration. If your placenta does go to pathology for testing, you must organise to collect your own placenta by calling **Australian Clinical Laboratories on 1300 453 688**.

If you do not want to have your placenta stored for 24 hours after birth, or have it sent off for testing, then a doctor will discuss your options with you in order to help you make an informed decision.

Basic health precautions

Health precautions are important to prevent the outbreak of disease and to protect the public health. Human tissue provides a perfect environment for micro-organisms to grow. These can be a threat to the health of human beings. In order to reduce the risk of infection you need to take the following steps:

1. Placentas which are stored for 24 hours in birth suite and not sent to pathology may be collected directly from birth suite once the time period is up. As the placenta has been

refrigerated, it is recommended the placenta is kept cool in an esky on ice/ice packs in its bag and taken directly home for further refrigeration and or freezing.

2. If you do not wish to have your placenta stored for 24 hours and or sent to pathology, it may only be taken directly from Birth Suite if it is removed within four hours and contained correctly.
3. The placenta will be enclosed in a labelled, leak proof plastic bag for transport which the staff in birth suite will do for you.
4. The container must not be re-opened on hospital premises

Legal requirements when burying human tissue

It is a criminal offence to bury human 'bodily remains' anywhere other than in a public cemetery, unless the Secretary of the Department of Health & Human Services has granted approval. There are a couple of exceptions to this law because they are not considered 'bodily remains' by law. Placentas are one of these exceptions. But because these are still considered 'human tissue' there are rules about how you must bury or cremate your placenta:

1. You must cremate at a high temperature or bury the placenta at a significant depth. Human tissue must never be placed in a domestic or council waste bins. It is your responsibility to ask your local council if there are any applicable guidelines in your municipality and to follow them.
2. As your placenta will rapidly deteriorate, it needs to be taken home as soon as possible. Usually within four hours after the birth (if they are not going to ACL) and stored in a cool place. They will need to be stored in the container provided, in a refrigerator that does not contain any food and for no more than 48-72 hours before burial.
3. Another alternative is to keep your placenta in the provided container, on ice and in an Esky, for no more than 48 hours prior to burial. The Esky will need a thorough clean with warm soapy water after this use to remove any visible sign of blood or tissue. While the risk of getting an infection from healthy tissue is not high, standard hygiene precautions should always be followed.
4. To reduce the possible transfer of organisms, cuts and abrasions should be covered when handling your placenta. Protective gloves should also be used and hands well

washed after handling or burial. Keep handling to a minimum to avoid exposure to organisms. Avoid eating or smoking around your placenta.

5. Your placenta will need to be buried in a hole that is at least one metre in depth, to prevent it being scavenged by animals and becoming a potential source of infection to humans. Do not bury your placenta near a waterway.

Next steps

We will ask you to sign the Consent for Release of Human Tissue - Placenta to indicate you understand the public health issues associated with your request and agree to take responsibility for the safe containment, management and disposal of your human tissue. If you do not understand this information, you are welcome to discuss your issues with our clinical staff before signing the form.

Where to find more information

To find your local council visit your local government website at:

<http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/local-government/find-your-local-council>

Royal Women's Hospital Victoria, fact sheet: Taking your placenta home for burial retrieved 2/9/2015 from: <https://thewomens.r.worldssl.net/images/uploads/fact-sheets/Taking-Placenta-Home-Burial.pdf>