NHS
Royal Devon
University Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

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Update on the temporary suspension of birth services at North Devon District Hospital

Planning for birthing services to reopen from 29 September

We are working towards reopening birthing services at North Devon District Hospital on **Tuesday 29 September**, subject to final checks and all essential safety criteria being met.

We have made positive progress in recruiting the medical staff needed to support the service. Following a review of the staffing requirements and the progress being made with recruitment and induction, we are confident that we now have the medical staff required.

Before reopening, we need to complete final checks of the medical staffing rotas, ensure the right mix of skills is available across the clinical team and confirm that all essential safety criteria have been met.

A final review and formal decision will take place on **Monday 14 September**. This will allow us to give women and birthing people clear and reliable information about where they can give birth.

Dr Vanessa Purday, Chief Medical Officer, said: “We fully recognise the disruption and anxiety caused by the temporary suspension and we are grateful to women and birthing people, their families, colleagues and partners for their patience and support.

“This is an important step forward towards restoring services closer to home and being assured of patient safety and continuity of care. We hope this provides certainty for our colleagues who work in those services, for women, birthing people and their families and the communities that rely on these services.”

Key updates at a glance

- Planning is underway to reopen birthing services at NDDH from 29 September, subject to final safety checks and approval on 14 September.
- We have made positive progress recruiting the doctors needed to support a safe reopening.
- Between 11 August and 2 September, 77 North Devon women and birthing people gave birth at RD&E.
- Free taxi support has now been launched following work between Devon County Council, NHS Devon ICB and the Trust.
- Feedback campaign has launched working with Devon Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership.

The temporary suspension remains in place

Until reopening is formally confirmed, the temporary suspension remains in place. Women and birthing people should continue to follow their personalised birth plans and contact the **24-hour maternity triage line on 01392 406616** as early as possible if they think they may be in labour or have any urgent concerns.

A dedicated helpline is also available for pregnant women and birthing people with non-urgent questions about the temporary suspension. Call **01271 335773 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday**.

We will provide further information about how services will move back to North Devon District Hospital as soon as these arrangements are confirmed.

Recruitment and the requirements for reopening

The service needs two separate but connected medical rotas to provide 24-hour cover. The reopening model requires both rotas to be fully staffed, with at least 75% of each rota filled by permanently employed staff, reducing reliance on temporary doctors.

Our recruitment campaign has been focused both on addressing the immediate staffing gaps and securing permanent appointments to support the service over the longer term.

Positive progress in recruiting the medical staff needed to support the service. The consultant recruitment campaign has been promoted through NHS Jobs, the BMJ, Career Gateway, professional networks, social media and direct searches for potential candidates. By 28 August, the campaign had generated 150,982 views and 14,906 clicks.

There is a national shortage of suitably qualified obstetrics and gynaecology consultants, and recruitment remains highly competitive. We will therefore continue recruiting permanent staff to support the longer-term resilience of the service.

Travel, accommodation and other support

Additional support is being provided – in particular, dedicated appointments where women and birthing people can discuss accommodation and transport needs. They can be referred by their community midwife.

With support from Devon County Council and NHS Devon Integrated Care Board, we have introduced **free taxi support**. Where maternity triage advises someone that they need to travel to hospital, the cost of a taxi can be covered. Eligible women and birthing people will receive details of participating taxi companies and a code so the journey can be charged to the NHS.

We are also sharing:

- A discount code for a hotel in Exeter

- Information about the limited accommodation available at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital
- Updated information through MY CARE and our patient information pack.

Women and birthing people should speak to their midwife if they have concerns about these arrangements or need additional help.

Listening to women and families

We want to understand how women, birthing people and families are experiencing the temporary arrangements so that we can make improvements wherever possible. Devon Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership has launched a survey for people affected by the temporary suspension. Women and birthing people can also share anonymous feedback through Care Opinion, which goes directly to our maternity team.

These options are available alongside the usual ways to raise concerns or provide feedback to the Trust.

The wider future of North Devon District Hospital

We know there has been speculation about the future of North Devon District Hospital. We have no plans to downgrade services at the hospital.

We are investing in services, including the expansion of Same Day Emergency Care, as part of wider work to reduce pressure, improve waiting times and keep care safe and sustainable.

However, there are challenges that health providers face in maintaining safe local services for rural communities. NDDH is not alone in experiencing staffing issues that led to the temporary suspension of birthing services at NDDH. That our new hospital rebuild has been put back to 2040 risks heightening service fragility in North Devon. We will continue to push for investment and support.

Where to find further information

Our dedicated North Devon birth services temporary changes webpage contains the latest updates, frequently asked questions and support information.

Women, birthing people and families can also read our patient information pack, which is available in translated and Easy Read formats.

We remain focused on supporting everyone affected by the temporary suspension and delivering on our commitment to reopen birthing services as quickly and safely as possible. We will continue to keep women, families, staff and local communities informed, including publishing a further update following the final review on **14 September**.