Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Temporary suspension of birth services at North Devon District Hospital

28 October 2026

This update provides the latest information on the temporary suspension of birthing services at North Devon District Hospital (NDDH).

Latest updates at a glance:

- Following our latest assessment on Monday 26 October, birthing services at NDDH remain temporarily suspended.
- We continue to recruit the specialist doctors needed to safely reopen the service. Our recruitment campaign is now reaching candidates in the UK and internationally. New staff also need to complete checks, induction and assessments before they can join the rota.
- Since the temporary suspension began, 242 North Devon women and birthing people have given birth at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (RD&E). There have been no confirmed safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension.
- We continue to listen to feedback from women, birthing people and families and make changes where we can. We would encourage anyone who has used our maternity services during this period to share their experience.

Progress towards reopening

Following our latest maternity readiness assessment on Monday 26 October, birthing services at NDDH remain temporarily suspended.

Our focus remains on supporting women, birthing people and families affected by the temporary suspension, while doing everything we can to reopen birthing services as quickly and safely as possible.

A key part of this is recruiting the specialist doctors we need to provide a safe and sustainable service. We are looking at both permanent and temporary staffing:

- Recruitment activity for permanent staff has started in Australia and New Zealand.

- We are launching an advertising campaign in Canada this week.
- We are exploring recruitment campaigns in the United Arab Emirates and South Africa.
- We continue to advertise vacancies in the UK.

Recruitment is only one part of the process. Before newly recruited doctors can join the rota, they also need to complete the necessary employment checks, induction and assessments to make sure they are ready to work safely within our maternity service.

Our next readiness assessment will take place on **Monday 9 November**, and we will provide a further update afterwards.

We understand that women, families and communities across North Devon want certainty about when birthing services will reopen. We will only announce a reopening date once all of the safety criteria have been met and a formal decision has been made.

Operational update

Since the temporary suspension began on 11 August and up to 27 October:

- 242 North Devon women and birthing people have given birth at RD&E.
- There have been no confirmed safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension.
- 6 women and birthing people have been taken to RD&E by ambulance.
- There have been 527 maternity triage attendances at RD&E from North Devon women and birthing people.
- There have been fewer than 5 births before arrival, meaning births that happened before a midwife or obstetrician arrived.

Community midwifery, antenatal care, scans and outpatient maternity services continue to be provided in North Devon.

What do these figures mean?

1. **What do the maternity triage numbers tell us?**

Maternity triage is where women and birthing people can get urgent advice or assessment during pregnancy.

On average, we would expect someone to attend maternity triage approximately twice during their pregnancy. We are monitoring attendance closely because a fall in

the average number of visits could suggest that the additional distance to RD&E is making it harder for people to seek care.

So far, we have not seen a change in the average number of maternity triage attendances since the temporary suspension began.

2. **What do we mean by a safety incident?**

The NHS has an agreed definition of what constitutes a clinical safety incident. We recognise that this may be different from how an individual woman or family describes their experience.

All incidents are reviewed by senior clinical staff. As part of this review, we specifically consider whether an incident could be linked to the temporary suspension of birthing services at NDDH.

So far, there have been no confirmed safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension. We continue to monitor this closely.

3. **What is a birth before arrival?**

A birth before arrival, sometimes called a BBA, is a birth that happens before a midwife or obstetrician arrives to provide care.

Births before arrival also happened when NDDH's birthing service was open, with a small number normally expected each month.

To protect patient confidentiality, we are reporting the current figure as fewer than five rather than giving an exact number.

4. **What do the ambulance figures tell us?**

Since the temporary suspension began, six women and birthing people have been taken to RD&E by ambulance.

For context, before the temporary suspension, around 10 maternity-related ambulance journeys a month would typically take place from the North Devon area to hospitals across the region.

Responding to national discussion about maternity services

Last week there was national media coverage about how maternity care could be organised in the future. This included reference to maternity units around England experiencing challenges with staffing, resilience or quality, including North Devon District Hospital.

We welcome the national focus on ensuring maternity services are safe, high quality and sustainable.

Patient safety must always come first, and it is right that the NHS considers how services can be made safe and sustainable for the future. At the same time, any

future model of maternity care must take account of North Devon's geography, travel times and the needs of local communities, as well as the specialist staff and clinical support needed to provide safe care.

Our position has not changed. We continue to make every possible effort to restore births at North Devon District Hospital as soon as it is safe to do so.

We are working with regional and national NHS partners to secure the specialist workforce and clinical support needed to provide a safe and sustainable maternity service for women, birthing people and families in North Devon.

Listening and responding to feedback

We continue to listen to women, birthing people and families about their experiences during the temporary suspension, working closely with the Devon Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP).

We are using this feedback to identify practical changes that can make things easier for families while birthing services remain temporarily suspended.

We are sharing examples of the changes we have made on our social media channels and continue to encourage women and families to share their experiences through the Devon MNVP survey. Here is an example:

Key resources and information

Women and birthing people should continue to follow their personalised birth plans and contact our 24/7 maternity triage service on **01392 406616** early if they think they may be in labour or have urgent concerns.

For non-urgent questions, women and families can:

- Speak to their midwife at their next appointment.
- Call our dedicated helpline on **01271 335773** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).
- Check our **frequently asked questions** and **information pack** for women, birthing people and families in Northern Devon.

We will continue to provide regular updates as work progresses towards the safe reopening of birthing services at North Devon District Hospital.