



TAKING YOUR PLACENTA HOME FOR BURIAL OR CONSUMPTION

In most cases it is fine to take your placenta home for burial or consumption as long as you follow the basic health and safety precautions that are explained below.

There are no laws or guidelines regarding the consumption of your placenta but there are some standard precautions you can take to protect your health and safety.

There are laws regarding the burial of your placenta, which are designed to protect public health. A placenta provides a perfect environment for germs to grow, which can be a threat to your health and other people around you.

After the birth, your placenta will be checked by a midwife to make sure that it is whole and that nothing has been left behind.

Sometimes, it is necessary for your placenta to go to a laboratory to be examined further. If this is the case you will not be able to take the placenta home immediately or take it home for consumption.

To lessen the risk of infection you need to follow the instructions outlined below.

Taking your placenta home for burial

- If you plan to bury your placenta, and no further examination is required, it will need to be placed in a biodegradable cardboard container (provided by the Women's) for transport and burial. Once the placenta is sealed in the container, it should not be re-opened or handled to avoid the risk of infection.
- In most circumstances it is a criminal offence to bury 'bodily remains' anywhere, other than in a public cemetery. However, a placenta is not considered 'bodily remains'. A placenta is 'human tissue', which the law says must **be incinerated at a high temperature or buried at a significant depth** and not placed in domestic or council waste bins. It is your responsibility to ask your local council what the guidelines are in your municipality and to follow them.

- As the placenta will rapidly deteriorate it needs to be taken home as soon as possible after the birth and stored in a cool place. It should be stored in a refrigerator that does not contain any food and buried within 48 to 72 hours. Another alternative is to keep the placenta in its container, on ice and in an esky, for no more than 48 hours prior to burial. The esky will need to be thoroughly cleaned afterwards.
- While the risk of getting an infection from a healthy placenta is not high, standard hygiene precautions should always be followed. For example, you should handle the placenta as little as possible. When you are handling the placenta:
 - cover any cuts or abrasions you may have
 - wear protective gloves
 - wash your hands thoroughly afterwards
 - avoid eating or smoking around the placenta
- The placenta will need to be buried deeply enough (no less than one metre deep) to prevent it being scavenged by animals and becoming a potential source of infection to humans.

Taking your placenta home for consumption/encapsulation

Although there are no proven health benefits, some women choose to take their placentas home for consumption for personal, spiritual or cultural reasons.

- If you plan to take your placenta for consumption, such as encapsulation, tell your midwife before the birth. This is so the midwife knows to handle the placenta with sterile gloves and quickly put into your cooler.
- Placentas for consumption should be treated just as you would fresh, raw meat and should be placed in your cooler as soon as possible. The placenta should not be stored in a fridge where food is kept.

- Placental remains from the encapsulation process must be treated as human tissue and buried as described above.
- Placentas that are sent for examination in the laboratory will be released for burial only.

If your placenta needs examination in the laboratory

The placenta can provide very useful information about your pregnancy and birth, especially where there have been problems with you or your baby. Your doctor or midwife will discuss their reasons with you if they think examination is needed.

If you have an infection or suspected infection, you will not be able to take the placenta home for consumption. This is due to the risk of transmitting that infection to you and your family (though you can still take it for burial). For your safety, reputable companies who provide encapsulation services will reject placentas where infection is confirmed or suspected or when there is risk the placenta will become contaminated before it reaches them (such as if it has been examined in the laboratory for any reason).

The pathology department will contact you once the examination is complete and you can then make arrangements for its collection. Your placenta must be collected as soon as possible as it will be disposed of fourteen days after you have been contacted. You will be asked to sign a form called *Release of Tissue for Personal Burial* to confirm that you understand this information before the placenta can be released to you.

For more information

To find contact details for your local council

W: knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au

For information about your health

Women's Welcome Centre (Victoria only)

Royal Women's Hospital

T: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)

E: wwcadmin@thewomens.org.au

For medical emergencies

Women's Emergency Care

Royal Women's Hospital

Flemington Road entrance

Parkville

T: (03) 8345 2000

Or attend your local emergency department at your local hospital

For information about your baby's health

Your local Maternal & Child Health Nurse

Victorian Maternal & Child Health Line (24 hours)

T: 13 2 29