



TAKING YOUR PLACENTA HOME

Some families wish to take the baby's placenta home to bury it. Others would like to take the placenta home for 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 precautions you can take to protect for your health and safety.

There are laws regarding the burial of your placenta. These 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 the health of other people around you.

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.

Reducing the risk of infection

To reduce the risk of infection it is important to follow the instructions outlines below.

If you plan to bury your placenta

- » If you plan to bury your placenta it will need to be placed in a container for transport and burial. Once the placenta is sealed in the container, it should not be re-opened or handled until you are ready to bury it.
- » 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 if there are any particular guidelines in your municipality and to follow them.
- » As the placenta will rapidly break down and 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 deep enough (no less than one metre) to prevent it:
 - being scavenged by animals
 - becoming a potential source of infection to humans.

Placentas 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 to 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. However, 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.

When your placenta needs further examination

The placenta can provide very useful information about your pregnancy and birth. This is especially useful if you or your baby have had any health problems. If your doctor or midwife feels that the placenta needs to be examined further they will talk with you about why this is necessary. The placenta will then be sent to a laboratory.

If you have an infection or suspected infection, it is best not to take the placenta home for consumption. This is due to the risk of transmitting the infection to your family (though you can still take it home for burial). For your safety, reputable companies who provide encapsulation services will reject placentas where infection is confirmed or suspected or when there is a risk that the placenta will become contaminated before it reaches them.

The pathology department will contact you once the examination is complete and you can then make arrangements for its collection. The laboratory cannot keep placentas indefinitely and will make arrangements for the disposal of uncollected placentas 14 days after collection, if there is no response from you when contacted to arrange 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 your local council

Visit the Local Government Victoria website at:
<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/localgovernment>

For medical emergencies

Women's Emergency Care

Royal Women's Hospital
Flemington Road entrance
Parkville
Tel: (03) 8345 3636

Or attend your local emergency department at your local hospital

For information about your baby's health

Maternal & Child