



Dear Colleagues,

PUBLICATION OF HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENT SCOTLAND (HIS) MATERNITY CARE STANDARDS

Purpose

1. The (HIS) Maternity Care Standards aim to support current and future provision of maternity services. They also promote improvement in the delivery and coordination of maternity care and support for all women and their babies.
2. The standards cover maternity care delivered in all settings, including midwifery units, community or home settings, hospitals, primary care and prisons.
3. These standards apply to all NHS Scotland staff involved in the multidisciplinary delivery of maternity services.
4. The standards apply to:
 - all women receiving maternity care in Scotland throughout their pregnancy and extending up to six weeks (42 days) after the birth of their baby
 - all babies receiving newborn care, until their care is transferred to the universal health visiting or family nurse partnership service (usually at ten days old). To note, the standards do not include babies receiving specialist neonatal care
 - care partners of women receiving maternity services, where appropriate.
5. (HIS) Maternity Care Standards can be found at <https://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.scot/publications/maternity-care-standards/>

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Addressees

For action
NHS Board Chief
Executives,
Medical Directors,
Nurse Directors,
Clinical Directors,
Directors of Midwifery,
Scottish Clinical
Directors for Obstetrics

For information
NHS Directors of Finance

Enquiries to:

Maternity, Neonatal and
IVF, Directorate for Chief
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[MaternalandInfantHealth
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Background

6. The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health formally commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland to develop the maternity standards in June 2024. Development of the standards took place during 2024/25 in parallel with their existing work to develop a set of clinical governance standards, published February 2026, which apply to all clinical services planned, commissioned or delivered within the health and social care system in Scotland

7. Healthcare Improvement Scotland has established a robust process for developing standards, which is informed by international standards development methodology. This ensures the standards:

- are fit for purpose and informed by current evidence and practice
- set out clearly what people who use services can expect to experience
- are an effective quality assurance tool.

8. The standards have been informed by current evidence, best practice recommendations, national policy and are developed by expert group consensus. The standards have been cocreated with key stakeholders and people with lived experience from across Scotland.

9. HIS have outlined 11 standards which aim to ensure all women and their babies who access maternity services, receive consistent, person-centred, compassionate, high-quality care and support, regardless of their individual circumstance or needs. These are:

- **Standard 1: Principles of care:** NHS boards ensure all women and babies have equitable, high-quality, safe and compassionate maternity care which respects their rights, preferences and choices.
- **Standard 2: Reducing inequalities:** NHS boards actively work to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes for women and their babies.
- **Standard 3: Leadership and culture:** Maternity services have effective leadership, robust clinical governance and a culture of openness and learning.
- **Standard 4: Service planning and facilities:** NHS boards ensure services and facilities deliver safe, high-quality maternity care.
- **Standard 5: High-performing and functioning teams:** Maternity care is delivered by high-performing and functioning multidisciplinary teams.
- **Standard 6: Antenatal care:** NHS boards ensure timely, safe and effective antenatal care.
- **Standard 7: Intrapartum care:** NHS boards ensure timely, safe and effective intrapartum care.
- **Standard 8: Postnatal and newborn care:** NHS boards ensure timely, safe and effective postnatal and newborn care.
- **Standard 9: Unscheduled, emergency and critical care:** NHS boards ensure women and babies receive unscheduled, emergency and critical care that is timely, safe and effective.

- **Standard 10: Mental health and wellbeing:** NHS boards ensure women and their babies can access mental health and wellbeing support that is timely, equitable, consistent and trauma informed.
- **Standard 11: Loss and bereavement:** Women who experience pregnancy or baby loss have compassionate, person-centred, trauma-informed care and support

Action

10. NHS Boards will undertake a six-month implementation period to embed the new standards. Healthcare Improvement Scotland will incorporate the new maternity standards into the Healthcare Improvement Scotland's (HIS) inspection programme from **Monday 21 September 2026 onwards**.

Your ongoing commitment to the improvement of maternity services is helping to ensure families receive high-quality, safe care and I am grateful for your continued efforts.

If you have any queries please contact MaternalandInfantHealth@gov.scot.

Yours sincerely,



CHRISTINE MCLAUGHLIN

Chief Operating Officer & Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Scotland