AIMS For a better birth...

# Preparing for birth in lockdown

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*By Lorraine Noble*

I don't remember the first time I heard about Coronavirus. I do know that I had no idea at the time of the impact it would have on all our lives.

Things got real for me in late February when I was at work and several colleagues left the office due to having symptoms and/or having travelled through Italy, which was a hot spot at the time. That was the day I realised how serious the situation could be and with being 30 weeks pregnant I didn't only have myself to think about. All babies are precious and after many years of trying for a baby, two losses and a long journey through infertility treatment my husband Paul and I were very protective of our "little button", who was conceived with the help of IVF.

When things stepped up a gear and there was talk about how we were only a matter of weeks behind Italy my employer trialled an emergency office closure to see if it was possible for us to work from home. It worked well and the trial instantly turned in to a permanent way of working with talk of it lasting for at least 3 months. I was thankful of how serious my employer was taking the situation but also a bit panicked by the reality of it. Around the same time the Government released guidance for vulnerable people, which included pregnant women, and I started to feel a bit scared. Paul was still expected to work from a busy office and I was worried about him bringing the virus home. I became a bit obsessed with washing hands, surfaces and disinfecting door handles and light switches. I found myself awake during the night on Google looking for answers on how the virus could affect unborn babies, pregnancy, giving birth and newborns. There never seemed to be a clear answer. With the virus being so new it was all a bit grey and I just wanted some black and white guidance on what I should and shouldn't be doing but it was difficult to find. Should we be having visitors over for my husband's birthday? Is it ok to have our nephews overnight? Can I go out for a walk with my Mum on Mother's Day? There were so many different opinions. I didn't want to be seen as overreacting but at the same time I didn't want to not react. I just wanted Boris Johnson to announce lockdown so we would all know where we stood and what we were to do.

There were loads of scare stories on social media and as much as I tried it was hard not to get sucked in and I found myself panic buying nappies and formula milk in case by the time our baby arrived these were impossible to buy. Thankfully we were pretty much organised with everything else we would need for the

baby so that was one less thing on my mind.

When lockdown was announced on the 5pm update I felt very emotional. I don't know if it was relief or if the reality of the situation hit home that night but after getting my head around it I took it as a positive. Now we had official guidance. Paul was now lucky enough to be able to work from home and I felt safer knowing that we could be in our own protective bubble, just us and our unborn, working from opposite sides of the dining table. It helped ease my biggest fear, which was of catching Coronavirus and passing it to our baby and the possibility of not being able to see our newborn if either of us had the virus around the time of giving birth if the baby was unwell and needed special care. I've now finished up for maternity leave and while Paul works I've been able to use this time at home to get prepared for our little one's arrival. I've watched online birthing classes, picked up my first book in years and even got round to choosing our wedding photos (almost a year since we got married)! The nice weather has meant being able to get out into the garden, which I think has kept us both sane and it's allowed us to spend some nice chilled time together just us two before life changes forever.

Of course I've been nervous about leaving the house for midwife appointments and I'm worried about what giving birth is going to look like. I may have to do part of it on the ward alone but as it stands right now, at my hospital, Paul will be able to be with me as soon as I'm in established labour and for up to six hours afterwards. If all is good we will be heading home with him after the six hours and that quite suits me as I feel that the longer we spend in hospital the more we're at risk.

I'm sad that we probably won't be able to let our family and friends meet our baby straight away and that they'll possibly miss out on the first few weeks (maybe more) but at the same time we need to put a positive spin on things and appreciate the time alone as a new family to get to know our baby and have him/her all to ourselves. I will 100% miss the help of our parents and the reassurance of visitors to know that we're doing ok as new parents but at the same time maybe we're better off finding our feet by ourselves and learning as we go and in our own time. There'll be no pressure to have a tidy house and the tea on and biscuits in and it'll give me more time and space to recover from labour while focusing on just us three and adapting to our new life. Although my Mum jokes she'll have her nose pressed to the window every morning before we even have the blinds open!

I pictured maternity leave being spent meeting other mums and trying out all the baby classes but that's also unknown right now. We'll just need to wait and see how the rest of the year plays out. I'm trying to take a day at a time rather then get caught up in trying to guess what the next few months will look like because no one really knows.

I've written this today while I'm feeling strong and in a good place, feeling ready to become a mum and take on whatever the future holds but I do have days where I'm worried and sad about the current situation but that's not going to change anything and we just need to do what we need to do. There's loads of time to make up for missed get togethers, showing our baby off and loads of saved up baby cuddles and not everyone will be able to tell their child that they were born in the middle of a worldwide pandemic.

2020 will be a year that we'll remember for so many reasons and I don't want to look back on it and remember feeling scared so I'll continue to get on with it while focusing on the positives and the nice memories that we are able to make just now.