AIMS For a better birth...

Preparing for freebirth during Covid-19

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AIMS Journal, 2020, Vol 32, No 2



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Today is the 29th of March and my 14th day isolating. Last Thursday I moved into my third trimester at 28 weeks and I have to be honest, it wasn't how I expected it to be. Two weeks ago tomorrow I was sent home from work after expressing to my manager how concerned I was about the coronavirus. I work in sales for a telecommunications company within a call centre. At the time, we were all sat about a foot apart when the Prime Minister made an announcement on what was to come. As I was listening to Boris tell us all that many more families will 'lose loved ones before their time', maternal instinct kicked in and I had the overwhelming feeling of wanting to be back home and safe. After speaking to my manager and explaining that I was worried that we just didn't know enough about the virus, they agreed to send me home on full pay for two weeks whilst they waited for further government instruction. As soon as I arrived home, I knew I wouldn't be going back to work for a long time.

The plan after that was to try to work out what the future of my pregnancy was going to look like for me. I spent hours watching the news and trying to piece together what was happening in other countries, how far behind we were in comparison to them and trying to look at the science and decipher what state the country would be in by my due date of June the 19th.

I felt that my previous birth had too many unnecessary interventions so this time I was hoping for a homebirth. All of my appointments and scans had thankfully gone smoothly and my midwives and consultant agreed that a homebirth would be the best for me when the time came. As the days passed

after being sent home from work, I could see that homebirths were being cancelled across various trusts and I felt it was only a matter of time before my plans would have to change. I looked up the pros and cons of going to hospital versus having a freebirth as I felt that those were the two outcomes that I could depend on, and I decided that I wanted to have a freebirth. I joined some groups online, bought a book for my Kindle and started to research freebirth in depth. Once I realised that I wouldn't have any access to medicated pain relief, I also paid for an online hypnobirthing course. I also requested to take holidays and then start my maternity leave earlier than planned with my employer.

One main concern with freebirthing was that my husband would be very anxious during my labour, and knowing that I wanted to be able to be fully focused on the job in hand (giving birth to another human, which seemed a big enough task in itself) I contacted a doula who spoke with us over the phone and agreed that she would provide telephone support for James should he need it when the time came (with the understanding that she can't offer medical or midwifery advice).

After this I was starting to feel much more in control of the situation. Possibly a freebirth was the birth that I had wanted all along but I was just a little fearful to look inside for that inner confidence. In some ways Covid-19 pushed me to make a more thoughtful decision. If any silver linings have come out of this experience for me then that's it. Today I have formally cancelled any further antenatal appointments. I have weighed up the pros and cons and decided that it's in my baby's best interest to not be exposed to any risk of me catching the virus versus the benefits of attending the appointments. I had a reply from the head of midwifery who said that they understand my concerns and will have one of the community midwives give me a courtesy call next week just to make sure I have all of the contact details that I would need should I need further assistance.

Overall, I am coping very well so far. I have a lot of research and courses to do that will keep me occupied – not to mention I have a home to run and a nearly two-year-old daughter to run around after so I don't have time to get complacent. I have a very strong virtual support network of other mothers online that keep me pepped and feeling strong which I am thankful for.

If I pull this off and have an unassisted, unmedicated birth at home then I think it may well be the most powerful experience I have ever had. I doubt I would have had an experience like this without the coronavirus epidemic and, although it's very unusual and unfortunate circumstances, I guess my freebirth is the light at the end of my tunnel.