



Worries about Covid-19 and the homebirth solution

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By Caroline Basden

I was six months pregnant with my third baby when lockdown started in March 2020.

I remember the press conference when shielding was first announced. Suddenly there was so much confusion for those of us who were pregnant. Were we meant to shield? Was the risk actually higher for us? We immediately pulled our two boys out of school and preschool and were fortunate to both work from home, so aside from the odd 7.30am supermarket run, we began our new normal: homeschooling and more family time than we ever imagined!

Nerves about what this meant for my birth plan immediately crept in. My first two births hadn't been the easiest. My first-born was induced, and I had an epidural and required forceps in theatre. My second-born came naturally, with minimal pain relief, but required neonatal care for the first 48 hours and we spent almost a week in hospital. I had always felt safe in hospital but now, for the first time, I began to question that.

My other big concern was childcare and whether my husband would be able to be present at the birth. My mum and sister live close by and the plan had been for them to look after the boys when my labour started but the worry now was, what if one of us contracted Covid?

My husband can be a bit of a worrier and previously the thought of a homebirth would have terrified him,

but we had attended the first session of a hypnobirthing course in early March. One of the points discussed at this was the importance of the birth environment and the benefits of homebirth or a home-like environment. Thanks to this, and his worries about Covid now outweighing his worries about the birth, my husband amazed me by suggesting we try a homebirth.

I switched to the homebirth midwife team. We were lucky that our hospital prioritised keeping them running. One of the key benefits of this was that I actually got to see my named midwife face to face and have appointments at home.

I also continued my hypnobirthing course via Zoom and tried to gather as much information on homebirths through the supportive local homebirth group on Facebook. This fantastic group met online monthly and shared positive birth stories, and the parents who'd had their babies came back and answered questions and gave helpful tips. I slowly began to feel more confident, although a part of me worried after my previous two experiences that there was no way this would all go to plan.

I did visit the hospital, right at the end of March, after a day when I had barely felt the baby move. I was scared to go in, but went late on a Sunday night and I've never seen the normally busy hospital so quiet. I was monitored and of course the baby began moving straightaway. It did give me a massive relief to be checked over and I absolutely think the stress of lockdown had caused my worries.

I remember my last couple of months of pregnancy quite fondly. Which is weird as not only were we mid global pandemic, but we had some pretty traumatic times and losses within our extended family. I think perhaps these factors and the fact I was homeschooling my boys distracted me from any pregnancy worries!

Our baby was due on the 10th of June and things did begin reopening just before this; however, we didn't want to take any risks. There was no way I wanted to send the boys back to school and preschool only to have one of them catch a cough. We remained locked down.

My due date passed, and I then became the only pregnant person ever to want to go more overdue as it was my second son's birthday on the 14th. Luckily, baby stayed put and we had a lovely party just for the four of us. The excitement of a drive-thru McDonald's made his day!

I did then start to get a bit more impatient and when the midwife came to see me on the 17th I was happy for her to do a post-date treatment. This involved acupressure, aromatherapy and a sweep. That afternoon we went for a long walk, I bounced on my yoga ball, we had a spicy curry for dinner, I expressed some colostrum and did everything to encourage labour to kick-start. The midwife had seemed very optimistic, but there was no sign of the baby's arrival.

I was adamant that I didn't want to be induced. It had been a bad experience the first time and, in the pandemic, an extended time in hospital alone (at least initially) was the last thing I wanted. The midwife said she had to follow procedures and book me in, but she said the homebirth team would be supportive if I wanted to push it back a few days. And so, I was booked in for induction on the 20th of June.

On the 18th I remember having a fairly relaxed day. I'd tried everything the day before, so we just got on with our regular day-to-day lockdown life. That evening we got the boys to bed as normal and my husband had his regular weekly computer games night, so I had an evening of bouncing on my yoga ball whilst watching TV.

As the evening progressed, I started to feel a bit of discomfort and at around 9.30pm, I realised that it might be the night. I decided to go and get some sleep. I think the nerves were kicking in and now I wanted to slow things down.

The baby, however, didn't want to slow down and by 10pm I realised I definitely wasn't getting to sleep. I went back downstairs and told my husband who had just finished his games night. Within another half hour we were sure enough to call the midwife who arrived around 11pm.

My previous labours had been long, so when she offered to examine me, I said yes, definitely. I wanted to know how far along I was. When I couldn't get into a comfy position to be examined I remember her saying that it didn't matter, she was confident I was in established labour and her only question was whether the baby would be born that day (within the hour) or the next day.

The next hour is a bit of a blur and I mostly remember lots of "I can't do this ..." and the reassurance from my husband and midwives that I could!

Our little girl, Daisy, was born at 12.10am in our living room, something that I'm not sure would have happened if it was not for Covid. After an hour or so of breastfeeding I was able to enjoy a shower and some crumpets before heading up to my own bed. The boys slept through it all and were surprised with a baby sister when they came in to wake us the next morning. This was a beautiful moment, and I can't imagine how I would have felt if I'd been alone in hospital and they weren't able to meet her so soon.



Having a baby in the pandemic certainly wasn't the easiest experience but in the weeks afterwards it had its advantages. My 9lb baby breastfed so much and so well that she was 10lb by two weeks old!^[1] There was no pressure to pass her around to visitors. The boys got to spend so much time with their little sister and now, one year later, the three of them are so close.

We've had an unusual first year with more homeschooling and a lack of the normal support systems, such as baby groups, for much of the year. However, I have been fortunate to spend lots of time with my family and close friends and towards the end of my maternity leave I managed some normality.

Daisy is a happy, confident little girl who has been on fast-forward to learn everything, walking at 10 months to try and catch up with her brothers. She is now at nursery and settled in so easily I think she was a bit bored of all the time at home with me! Whilst the later months of my pregnancy weren't what I planned, I am still fortunate to have an amazing daughter and to overall have had a positive experience.

Author Bio: Caroline lives in Reading with her husband and three children. She enjoys her day job as a Financial Adviser and in her spare time is a volunteer for her local NCT branch, Maternity Voices Partnership and the school PTA.

[1] Editor's note: Daisy clearly thrived on the unrestricted feeding that lockdown allowed. It is perhaps worth mentioning that some equally healthy babies will gain weight more gradually.