



Department of Health

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Hospital CEO/Birth Center Administrator:

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many hospitals and birthing facilities enacted strict limits on the number of visitors allowed in their facility as well as the duration of stay for many visitors, in keeping with Department of Health (Department) guidance and New York State Executive Orders.

In March 2020, Governor Cuomo issued the first of a series of Executive Orders that proactively affirmed the right of all birthing people in New York State to be accompanied by a support person while admitted to a hospital or birthing center for labor and delivery (Executive Order 202.12). Subsequent guidance and updates to Executive Orders further clarified that support persons must be allowed to accompany any birthing person for the duration of their inpatient stay, which included labor, delivery, and postpartum care provided after birth (Executive Order 202.13).

Executive Order 202.25, issued in April 2020, further affirmed the right of all birthing people to be accompanied by a doula **in addition to** their designated support person. Doulas are trained professionals who provide emotional and physical support to individuals during labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period. Doulas are an essential part of a birthing care team.

To date, existing [Executive Orders](#) and New York State Department of Health [guidance](#) require all birthing hospitals and centers to:

- Allow all birthing people to be accompanied by a support person of their choosing for the duration of their in-patient general hospital or birth center stay.
- Provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) to support persons who accompany birthing people during labor, delivery, and while receiving postpartum care.
- Allow doulas to accompany birthing people to provide practical and emotional support during their in-patient hospital stay.

New York State does not currently have statewide professional licensure guidelines or certification requirements for doulas. Doulas may receive training or certification from numerous professional organizations or through an apprenticeship program. Some birthing people may also choose to contract with a doula who is still in the process of receiving their certification/training. Relationships between doulas and clients represent private agreements between individuals and are developed regardless of the specific birthing facility individuals are planning to utilize.

Current Executive Orders and Department of Health guidance do not require hospitals to request or mandate that doulas accompanying birthing people provide proof of certification when entering a birthing facility. Hospitals are discouraged from placing unnecessary burdens on birthing individuals wishing to be accompanied by a doula and a support person during their

hospital stay. Requiring that doulas present certification in order to accompany a client during birth is an example of an undue burden to doulas and their clients.

In addition to minimizing barriers for doulas accompanying birthing persons to hospitals or other birthing centers, facilities should take reasonable steps to support virtual or web-based doula support whenever possible. This may include allowing birthing persons to use personal cell or communication devices to connect with doulas during labor and/or delivery, use of secure public WI-FI networks, and other reasonable accommodations as necessary.

Information on the facility's visitation policy, including specific information for birthing people and guidance on doulas, should be clearly stated on hospital and birthing center websites. This information must be easily accessible and understandable to the general public. Questions about support persons and/or doula policies during the COVID-19 pandemic can be directed to: hospinfo@health.ny.gov.

Sincerely,

Lauren J. Tobias, Director
Division of Family Health

Deirdre Astin, Director
Division of Hospitals and
Diagnostic & Treatment Centers