

Postnatal virtual and home visits by midwives during COVID-19 pandemic

Maria Gjoni¹, Efstathia M. Alevizou¹

Dear Editor,

During the COVID-19 pandemic postnatal midwifery-led care remains a key public health intervention for women and their families^{1,2}. Home or virtual visits by community midwives should be provided to reduce the number of times women and newborns need to leave their home¹. In order to comply with social distancing requirements, community midwives could deliver home or virtual visits and individualized postnatal care, according to the needs of the mother and the newborn¹. Midwifery-led postnatal home visiting could raise consciousness in parents on establishing breastfeeding, family planning and contraception after birth, preparation of milk formula, smoke-free environments at home, home hygiene, and care of the neonatal – especially after NICU discharge³. Midwifery-led virtual visits via videoconferencing decrease the number of visits to health facilities and enable mothers to be consulted immediately and from their own home⁴. Virtual visits have been demonstrated to be as safe as in-person visits⁵. Therefore, as early as possible, community midwives (especially those serving rural and remote areas) should receive all the relevant technology equipment and training regarding remote consultation⁵.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends at least four postnatal visits for all mothers and newborns, on day 1 (first 24 hours), on day 3 (48–72 hours), between days 7–14 and six weeks after birth⁶. However, a face-to-face consultation is required for physical examination and/or screening of mother and the newborn¹. Therefore, home visiting should be prioritized for women with psychosocial vulnerabilities, operative birth, premature or low birthweight baby and other medical or neonatal complications¹. Awareness should be raised about exposure to COVID-19 during a home visit, where midwives should abide by strict infection control equipment and procedures when entering and leaving homes¹.

Midwifery-led services are vital during the postpartum period for women suspected or confirmed with COVID-19. Parenting and breastfeeding support can be offered through face-to-face or virtual visits¹. Mothers with COVID-19 should be advised to establish breastfeeding or to express breastmilk, applying appropriate infection prevention and control measures^{2,7}. All breastfeeding women should be shown how to hand-express their breast milk and be advised on how to correctly store and freeze it. Breastfeeding counseling, neonatal care, family planning counseling, psychosocial parent support, practical feeding support and home hygiene should be provided to all mothers and their families, whether they or their children have suspected or confirmed COVID-19⁷.

Community midwives are a valuable resource either providing face-to-face visits or virtual visits⁸. They need adequate support⁸ to provide quality, holistic, women-centered postnatal care to mothers and newborns⁹ in these exceptionally complex circumstances in order to promote safe and respectful¹⁰ family-centered care, during periods of crisis including the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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AFFILIATION

¹ Midwifery Department, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece

CORRESPONDENCE TO

Maria Gjoni. Midwifery Department, University of West Attica, Athens, 12243, Greece. E-mail: mrgjoni10@gmail.com ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6737-4176>

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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