

Frequently Asked Questions about Birth Centers

1. What is a freestanding, independent, birth center?

- Independent birth centers are facilities designed to provide care to women with low risk pregnancies who want a choice between a hospital and home birth and want to participate in their own care; they are separate from and not owned by hospital organizations
- They have established partnerships to work collaboratively with near-by hospitals and physicians for mothers who need their services before or during labor, or after childbirth
- They provide prenatal and postpartum care, labor and birth services, and may also provide childbirth education, annual exams, birth control, and fertility counseling

2. What is the difference between an independent birth center and one that is in a hospital?

- Hospitals often call their labor and delivery units “birth” or “birthing” centers, especially after they remodel their facilities to be more “home-like”; they may also hire midwives to provide care
- Birth centers provide individualized care centered around the woman’s goals and the latest research
- Hospitals are larger, often with protocols and less flexibility, and a greater focus on efficiency

3. What is the midwifery model of care?

- The midwifery model of care is based on the belief that childbirth is a natural, physiologic process that does not require interventions without evidence of a problem; it produces high satisfaction, lower incidence of birth injury, trauma, complications, cesarean sections and higher rates of breast feeding
- Pain management is offered through natural means including water births, nitrous oxide, massage, and certain medications
- Nurse midwives may practice independently in many states and often have admitting privileges to hospitals. This allows them to continue to care for their patients who transfer from a birth center to a hospital during labor and have partnerships with physicians for patients who need their services

4. How can I know if a birth center is safe and provides high quality care?

- Birth centers require state licensure and, if accredited by CABC, must demonstrate they practice according to rigorous, evidence based, standards designed specifically for birth centers
- Midwives are licensed by each state and specialized training in midwifery

5. Are there any birth centers near me?

Some communities have more birth centers than others depending on state regulations, insurance coverage, the number of midwives available, and other factors.

Find the birth centers in your area with the birth center locator on BirthCenters.org (www.birthcenters.org/search/custom.asp?id=2926)

6. Are birth centers covered by insurance?

Maybe, check with your health plan to see if they include free-standing birth centers in their network; if not, some birth centers may help you request coverage from certain insurance companies

7. Why is the number of birth centers growing in the United States?

- There is a growing awareness, among Millennials, of alternatives to hospital births
- Women want care that focuses on natural birth in a home-like environment
- The Listening to Mothers III: New Mothers Speak Out survey found two-thirds of mothers planning more children would consider a birth center separate from a hospital; birth centers provide an option for those not wanting a hospital or home birth

8. How do I learn more about birth centers?

- The American Association of Birth Centers (AABC) information “For Parents”
- The Childbirth Connection provides in depth information about childbirth including choosing a caregiver, labor support, evidence based care, surveys of mothers and other maternity related information
- The Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers (CABC) lists accreditation requirements for birth centers and identifies accredited birth centers
- Local birth center websites provide information about their services, facilities, and staff
- The Leapfrog Group provides data on the quality of maternity care in hospitals