



# PROGENY

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## Immersion in Water During Labor and Delivery: Updated Guidelines from AAP and ACOG

Over the past few decades, immersion in water for labor, delivery, or both has gained popularity in the US. The issue of underwater birth has been a controversial topic in Iowa for the last ten years. Proponents of this practice claim benefit for mother and baby, while those who oppose underwater birth, specifically *delivery underwater*, argue the inherent risks to mother and baby. In April of this year, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) published a clinical report entitled, “Immersion in Water During Labor and Delivery.”<sup>1</sup> In this updated statement, the authors acknowledge that the term “underwater birth” is not always clearly defined. Some cases involve immersion in water for labor only (first stage) and others involve immersion for both labor and delivery (first and second stage). Safety during labor may not translate into safety during delivery, so it is important to make a clear distinction between the two when weighing the risks and benefits. The current recommendations from AAP and ACOG are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. For more information on the practice of water immersion for labor and delivery, please contact us at [StatewidePerinatal@uiowa.edu](mailto:StatewidePerinatal@uiowa.edu).

### REFERENCES

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Fetus and Newborn and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Committee on Obstetric Practice. Clinical Report: Immersion in Water During Labor and Delivery. *Pediatrics*. 2014;133(4):758-61.

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SEND QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS TO:

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**Table 1: Immersion in Water During First Stage of Labor<sup>1</sup>**

	Potential Benefits	Risks
Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased pain</li> <li>• Decreased use of anesthesia</li> <li>• Shorter duration of labor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infection, particularly with ruptured membranes</li> </ul>
Infant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No benefit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infection, particularly with ruptured membranes</li> <li>• Difficulties with thermoregulation</li> </ul>

**Recommendations:**

- May be appealing to some
- No evidence of improved perinatal outcomes
- Hospitals should establish rigorous protocols for candidate selection, maintenance and cleaning of tubs and immersion pools, infection control procedures, monitoring of mothers and fetuses at appropriate intervals while immersed, and protocols for moving women from tubs if urgent maternal or fetal concerns develop
- “Immersion therapy during the first stage of labor should not prevent or inhibit other elements of care, including appropriate maternal and fetal monitoring”

**Table 2: Immersion in Water During Second Stage of Labor<sup>1</sup>**

	Potential Benefits	Risks
Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No benefit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umbilical cord avulsion and rupture leading to hemorrhage and shock</li> <li>• Infection</li> </ul>
Infant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No benefit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umbilical cord avulsion and rupture leading to hemorrhage and shock</li> <li>• Infection</li> <li>• Difficulties with thermoregulation</li> <li>• Respiratory distress from tub water aspiration</li> <li>• Hyponatremia from tub water aspiration</li> <li>• Seizures</li> <li>• Perinatal asphyxia</li> <li>• Drowning or near drowning</li> </ul>

**Recommendations:**

- Safety and efficacy have not been established
- Has not been associated with maternal or fetal benefit
- “Given these facts and case reports of rare but serious adverse effects in the newborn, the practice of immersion in the second stage of labor (underwater delivery) should be considered an experimental procedure that only should be performed within the context of an appropriately designed clinical trial with informed consent.”