

POST-BIRTH WARNING SIGNS: TEACHING GUIDE



This guide is a teaching guide for nurses to use when educating all women about the essential warning signs that can result in maternal morbidity and/or mortality.

Instructions:

- Instruct ALL women about all of the following potential complications. All teaching should be documented on this form or in your facility's electronic health record.
- Focus on risk factors for a specific complication first; then review all warning signs.
- Emphasize that women do not have to experience ALL of the signs in each category for them to seek care.
- Encourage the woman's significant other or designated family members to be included in education whenever possible.

The information included in this guide is organized according to complications that can result in severe maternal morbidity or maternal mortality. Essential teaching points should be included in all postpartum discharge teaching.

The parent handout, "Save Your Life", is designed to reinforce this teaching. This handout is organized according to AWHONN's acronym, POST-BIRTH, to help everyone remember the key warning signs and when to call 911 or a health provider. A portion of this handout is below for reference.

Call 911 if you have:	<input type="checkbox"/> P ain in chest <input type="checkbox"/> O bstucted breathing or shortness of breath <input type="checkbox"/> S eizures <input type="checkbox"/> T houghts of hurting yourself or someone else
Call your healthcare provider if you have: <small>(If you can't reach your healthcare provider, call 911 or go to an emergency room)</small>	<input type="checkbox"/> B leeding, soaking through one pad/hour, or blood clots, the size of an egg or bigger <input type="checkbox"/> I ncision that is not healing <input type="checkbox"/> R ed or swollen leg, that is painful or warm to touch <input type="checkbox"/> T emperature of 100.4°F or higher <input type="checkbox"/> H eadache that does not get better, even after taking medicine, or bad headache with vision changes

Below is a suggested conversation-starter:

“Although most women who give birth recover without problems, any woman can have complications after the birth of a baby. Learning to recognize these POST-BIRTH warning signs and knowing what to do can save your life. I would like to go over these POST-BIRTH warning signs with you now, so you will know what to look for and when to call 911 or when to call your healthcare provider.

Please share this with family and friends and post the “Save Your Life” handout in a place where you can get to it easily (like your refrigerator).”



POST-BIRTH Warning Signs: Teaching Guide

Pulmonary Embolism	Essential Teaching Points
What is Pulmonary Embolism?	Pulmonary embolism is a blood clot that has traveled to your lung.
Signs of Pulmonary Embolism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath at rest (e.g., tachypneic, shallow, rapid respirations) • Chest pain that worsens when coughing • Change in level of consciousness
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call 911 or go to nearest emergency room RIGHT AWAY .

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Cardiac (Heart) Disease	Essential Teaching Points
What is Cardiac Disease?	Cardiac disease is when your heart is not working as well as it should and can include a number of disorders that may have different signs and symptoms.
Signs of Potential Cardiac Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing • Heart palpitations (feeling that your heart is racing) • Chest pain or pressure
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call 911 or go to nearest emergency room RIGHT AWAY .

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy	Essential Teaching Points
What is Severe Hypertension?	Hypertension is when your blood pressure is much higher than it should be.
Signs of Severe Hypertension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe, constant headache that does not respond to over-the-counter pain medicine, rest, and/or hydration
What is Preeclampsia/Eclampsia?	Preeclampsia is a complication of pregnancy that includes high blood pressure and signs of damage to other organ systems. Eclampsia is the convulsive phase of preeclampsia, characterized by seizures.
Signs of Preeclampsia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe, constant headache that does not respond to pain medicine, rest, and/or hydration • Changes in vision, seeing spots, or flashing lights • Pain in the upper right abdominal area • Swelling of face, hands, and/or legs more than what you would expect • Change in level of consciousness
Signs of Eclampsia	Seizures (or convulsions) can happen without warning in women with severe preeclampsia. Signs of eclampsia may include trouble breathing, passing out (losing consciousness), not being able to talk or get words out, and uncontrollable, shaky bodily movements. This occurs because of abnormal changes in brain activity.
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call 911 for seizures. If headache feels like the worst one of your life, or if symptoms worsen, call 911 or go to nearest emergency room RIGHT AWAY . Call healthcare provider immediately for any other signs.

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Obstetric Hemorrhage	Essential Teaching Points
What is Obstetric Hemorrhage?	Obstetric hemorrhage is when you have an excess amount of bleeding after you have given birth.
Signs of Obstetric Hemorrhage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bleeding through more than 1 sanitary pad/hour • Passing 1 or more clots the size of an egg or bigger • Character of clots/differentiation of bright red bleeding from dark with clots
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call healthcare provider immediately for signs of hemorrhage. If symptoms worsen or no response from provider/clinic, call 911 or go to nearest emergency room.

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO



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Venous Thromboembolism	Essential Teaching Points
What is Venous Thromboembolism?	Venous thromboembolism is when you develop a blood clot usually in your leg (calf area).
Signs of Venous Thromboembolism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leg pain, tender to touch, burning, or redness, particularly in the calf area • Swelling of one leg more than the other
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call healthcare provider immediately for above signs of venous thromboembolism. If symptoms worsen or no response from provider/clinic, call 911 or go to nearest emergency room.

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Infection	Essential Teaching Points
What is Infection?	An infection is an invasion of bacteria or viruses that enter and spread through your body, making you ill.
Signs of Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temp is $\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ($\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$) • Bad smelling blood or discharge from the vagina • Increase in redness or discharge from episiotomy or C-Section site or open wound not healing
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call healthcare provider immediately for above signs. If symptoms worsen or no response from provider/clinic, call 911 or go to nearest emergency room.

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Postpartum Depression	Essential Teaching Points
What is Postpartum Depression (PPD)?	Postpartum depression is a type of depression that occurs after childbirth. PPD can occur as early as one week up to one year after giving birth.
Signs of Postpartum Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking of hurting yourself or your baby • Feeling out of control, unable to care for self or baby • Feeling depressed or sad most of the day every day • Having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much • Having trouble bonding with your baby
Obtaining Immediate Care	Call 911 or go to nearest emergency room if you feel you might harm yourself or your baby. Call healthcare provider immediately for other signs of depression (sadness, withdrawn, difficulty coping with parenting).

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

Follow-Up Appointment	Essential Teaching Points
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss importance of follow-up visit with doctor, nurse practitioner or midwife in 4–6 weeks (or sooner if health status warrants it) • Provide correct phone number for appointment • Emphasize importance of notifying all healthcare providers of delivery date up to one year postpartum • Confirm date for postpartum appointment prior to discharge

RN initials _____ Date _____ Family/support person present? YES / NO

I have received and understand the POST-BIRTH Warning Signs education and handout.

Patient Signature: _____ Date/Time: _____

The patient received the POST-BIRTH Warning Signs education and a copy of the “Save Your Life” handout.

Nurse Initials and Signature: _____ Date/Time: _____