

Background

The placenta is a temporary organ that joins the mother and her baby whilst in the womb, transferring oxygen and nutrients from the mother to her baby.

Some mothers express a preference to take their placenta home rather than have the health service staff dispose of it. Noting exceptions, the *Policy for the Management of the Release of a Placenta for Private Use: South Australian Public Health Services* supports the release of the placenta to the mother immediately following birth of the baby.

Revered for its symbolism of life, spirit and individuality, in some cultures, the placenta of a baby with Aboriginal heritage may need to be buried on the home lands of his or her language group to ensure the baby secures ongoing cultural birthrights. Other cultures from across the world, wrap, bury or process the placenta in a variety of ways to uphold cultural traditions that will bind the baby to his or her ancestral land and cultural group.

The placenta has the potential to harbour micro-organisms or subsequently become contaminated and, with inappropriate handling of the placenta, can result in the transmission of infection.

The human consumption of placenta in any form such as 'fresh', capsules, tablets, or drinks reconstituted from powder is called 'placentophagy'. There is no reliable evidence to support any health benefit related to the human consumption of human placenta but there are some serious associated risks with this practice, including the risk of transmission of infection. SA Health does not recommend the human consumption of human placenta.

Once delivered, the placenta is considered as medical waste and requires safe disposal and handling in accordance with advice from the local health unit and compliance with Environmental Protection legislation. Please note that medical waste must not be placed into the local government domestic collection service.

Can I have my baby's placenta released to me?

You can request the release of your placenta after the birth of your baby. There are some exceptions as indicated below, but usually your placenta can be given to you to remove from the health unit after you have given birth.

Please discuss this with your midwife or medical officer in your antenatal period. Your request will be noted in your SA Pregnancy Record.

You will be required to complete the '*Request for Release of Human Placenta Form*' which will be stored in your SA Pregnancy Record and your medical record at the health care unit where you plan to birth.

How will I receive my baby's placenta?

A SA Health employee can usually organise the release of your placenta to you immediately after the birth of your baby.

To ensure the safety of those handling the placenta, your placenta will double-bagged and sealed in a plastic waste bag and then placed in a rigid walled leak-proof container for storage and transport. The container will be labelled with a date, your name and "Human tissue for collection" on the lid of the container.

Most SA Health units do not have facilities for the storage of the placenta.

You will be handed the placenta soon after the birth of your baby and you will be expected to have made suitable arrangements for the placenta to immediately be removed from SA Health premises.

Are there any reasons I cannot have my baby's placenta released to me?

In some instances SA Health employees are not permitted to release your placenta to you. These include:

- > in accordance with legislation such as the *Coroners Act 2003* (SA), or
- > if you have been diagnosed with an infectious condition, or
- > in the interim period when your infectious status is being determined, or
- > in the interim period in some SA Health units where there is a local procedure to store the placenta until discharge of your baby, or
- > if the placenta is needed for laboratory investigations, or
- > when the placenta has been assigned for research purposes (with your consent).

Does the placenta pose a health risk to me or my family?

The placenta may contain toxins or micro-organisms (germs) which are a risk to humans who handle or, ingest the placenta. To minimise this risk, you and your family should:

- > ensure handling of the placenta is kept to a minimum
- > ensure any person handling the placenta washes their hands well with soap and water afterwards
- > ensure the placenta is stored in a refrigerator or freezer and remain in the 'rigid walled, leak-proof plastic' container until immediately prior to use / disposal/ burial
- > ensure the placenta is buried within eight (8) hours of its removal from cold storage
- > ensure the placenta is buried at least one (1) metre deep to prevent it being scavenged by animals
- > be aware that if needed, the placenta can be returned to any SA Health hospital for disposal.

Will I incur any costs to have my placenta released to me?

SA Health will release your placenta to you at no cost.

There are private companies that provide placentophagy services for a fee. SA Health will not be responsible for any costs incurred by you when engaging these services.

Where can I get more information?

Further information regarding the management of placentas for private use can be obtained from your midwife or medical officer caring for you.

Also, upon request a health care provider will provide you with a copy of the SA Health *Policy for the Management of the Release of a Placenta for Private Use in South Australian Public Health Services*.

NB: Policy for the Management of the Release of a Placenta for Private Use in South Australian Public Health Services does not cover the management of Lotus Birth. Specific information regarding Lotus birth should be obtained from midwife or medical officer.

Important note: A copy of your informed consent must be provided, during your antenatal period, to the health unit where you plan to give birth. The responsibility of obtaining informed consent for collection of the placenta for private use, and the responsibility of arranging the collection, storage and transfer of the placenta, lies with you and your private collector. The South Australian public health unit will not be responsible for any stage of the placenta collection and processing.

ISBN: 978-1-74243-789-7

© Copyright Government of South Australia 2016

Disclaimer

This publication is a guide only and is not intended as professional advice. Readers are encouraged to seek appropriate professional advice before relying on any information contained in it. While care has been taken to ensure the material contained in this publication is up-to-date at the time of printing, the Minister for Health accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the material in the publication and expressly disclaims all liability for any loss or damage arising from reliance upon any information contained within it.

Department of Health, South Australia
Copies of this publication are available from
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/perinatal

PATIENT INFORMATION BROCHURE

Policy for the Management of the Release of a Placenta for Private Use

South Australian
Public Health Services

MAY 2016



Government of South Australia
Department of Health