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Landmark Study Reports Planned Home Births Are Safe

“Outcomes of planned home births with certified professional midwives: large prospective study in North America.” Kenneth C Johnson, senior epidemiologist, Betty-Anne Daviss, project manager. *BMJ* 2005;330:1416 (18 June). Published online at <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/330/7505/1416?ehom>

A study published in the June 18 edition of the *British Medical Journal* found that for low risk women in the United States, planned home births are as safe as hospital births, and accomplished with much less medical intervention, compared with low risk hospital births. The study results belie the consistent claim of U.S. medical professionals and their organizations that “home birth is dangerous,” a belief that is not supported by the weight of scientific evidence.

The researchers used prospective data on more than 5000 planned home births in North America attended by Certified Professional Midwives during the year 2000. They analyzed outcomes and medical interventions for planned home births, including transports to hospital care. “This study is the largest yet on this subject,” according to author Ken Johnson.

According to the *British Medical Journal* press release, they found:

- Planned home births “had a low mortality rate during labor and delivery, similar to [rates] found in most studies of low risk hospital births in North America.”
- “Rates of medical intervention, such as epidural, forceps and caesarean section, were lower for planned home births than for low risk hospital births.”
- “A high degree of safety and maternal satisfaction were reported, and over 87% of mothers and babies did not require transfer to hospital” care.

These outcomes indicate that, despite many of the midwives in the study not being well-integrated into the healthcare system, appropriate transports were accomplished, and mothers and babies who needed hospital-based medical care received that care.

Imagine the benefit to women and their families if these maternity care providers were welcomed and integrated into the American health care system. In addition, the results suggest that low risk women giving birth in hospitals may be subject to overuse of interventions that are not necessary for good outcomes. The average cesarean rate of less than 4% is particularly striking since the national cesarean rate in 2000 was nearly 23% and New York’s rate was nearly 25%.

“Sadly, access to this safe option is severely limited in the Capital Region, as it is in much of the state,” said BirthNet Co-Founder Carolyn Keefe. “Pregnant women seeking a planned home birth in New York have to hope that they live in one of the handful of areas in which midwives can attend home births. Also, Certified Professional Midwives have a much more difficult time getting licensed in New York State than Certified Nurse Midwives.”

For more information, contact the authors:

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For more information about the Certified Professional Midwife credential, contact:

North American Registry of Midwives – www.narm.org
Debbie Pulley, Public Education and Advocacy
1-888-842-4784; info@narm.org

For more information about midwifery education leading to the Certified Professional Midwife credential, contact:

Midwifery Education Accreditation Council – www.meac.org
Mary Ann Baul, Executive Director – 1-928-214-0997; Info@meacschools.org

For information about Certified Professional Midwives in the U.S. contact:

National Association of Certified Professional Midwives -- <http://nacpm.net/>
Mary Lawlor, President - (802) 387-4678; lawcing@sover.net

OR

Citizens for Midwifery – www.cfmidwifery.org
Susan Hodges, President – 1-888-236-4880; susan@cfmidwifery.org

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BirthNet is a non-profit organization whose mission is to educate the public about maternity care in order to improve it. Childbirth is a normal, natural and profound event in a woman's life. BirthNet's goal is to encourage all women and families to learn about their rights and options. Our primary programs include education in the classroom (high school or college classes), community forums or workshops, and media outreach. BirthNet has endorsed the Mother Friendly Childbirth Initiative and supports the Midwives Model of Care. For more information about BirthNet, please contact Carolyn Keefe 518-482-2504 or birthnet@birthnewyork.org.

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