

Taking Your Placenta or Products of Conception Home

The below information is to assist patients with storage, handling, and disposing of your placenta/products of conception (POC).

Health and Safety

There are some standard precautions that you should be aware of if you choose to take your placenta home. It is important to follow these precautions to ensure the safety of yourself and others in your household.

- Storage
- Handling of the placenta/POC
- Burial and disposal of the placenta/POC
- Taking your placenta/POC outside of Australia
- Consumption of placenta
- Formalin and the handling of Formalin
- POC are not to be consumed.

In most cases it is fine to take your placenta/POC home after birth. In some instances, your placenta/POC may need to go to Pathology for testing, which may impact on when you can receive your placenta and may change your intentions for your placenta/POC.

Please advise the midwife during your antenatal appointments, or when you present to birth if your intention is to take home your placenta.

On taking your placenta/POC home we ask you to sign the **Placenta/POC Release form** to indicate that you understand the public health risk and legal responsibilities associated with your request.

On some occasions your placenta may need to go to pathology and therefore you may not be able to take your placenta home straight from birth. In these instances, you will be contacted by the Townsville Hospital and Health Service Maternity Unit Clinical Midwifery Consultant (CMC) when your placenta is ready for you to collect from the Townsville University Hospital Maternity Unit Clinical Midwifery Consultant (CMC).

You will be given a date and time to collect your placenta/POC. If after three attempts by the CMC Maternity to organise collection from pathology the specimen will be disposed off by the anatomical pathology department.

If you have not made contact to arrange an alternate date and time your placenta/POC will be disposed of as per hospital procedure.

Formalin (Formaldehyde) and the handling of Formalin

If your placenta/POC has been sent to pathology it is highly likely it has been stored in Formalin (Formaldehyde). **Your placenta/POC will be washed before being returned to you however you should still take all precautions.**

Formaldehyde is a colourless, flammable gas at room temperature with a characteristic pungent odour. It is used by both clinical diagnostic and research laboratories as a preservative or tissue fixative. Because Formaldehyde is very water soluble it affects mucous membranes. The effects of formaldehyde exposure can vary from person to person. Exposure will cause eye irritation, skin irritation and respiratory irritation. Long-term, chronic exposure effects may include cancers of the lung, nasopharyngeal and oropharynx, and nasal passages. Formaldehyde is also toxic to animals and plants.

A specimen in formaldehyde should be transported only in original container, fully labelled and stored properly within the vehicle to prevent shifting, spillage or breakage. A specimen in formaldehyde should never be opened, mixed or transferred to another container at any time. If burying, ensure it remains in the container and is buried deep to reduce exposure to animals and plants.

If exposed to formaldehyde, flush exposed skin with copious amounts of water and remove contaminated clothing as quickly as possible to prevent continued exposure. Formaldehyde is not to be ingested. Spilled or used formaldehyde is considered a hazardous waste and must be disposed of in accordance to Townsville City Council laws.

Storage

- The placenta/POC will deteriorate rapidly take home as soon as possible after the birth and store in a working refrigerator or freezer (below 5° celsius) that does not contain any food products.
- The placenta/POC will be given to you in a leakproof, sealed container however you will be responsible for keeping your placenta cool therefore you will need to bring in a container that is able to do so, such as in an esky with ice. The esky will require a thorough clean after use.
- Once sealed in the container, the placenta/POC should not be re-opened on hospital premises. You will not be able to store your placenta/POC at the hospital if you are admitted as an inpatient therefore you will need to make plans to have your placenta/POC taken home as soon as possible following your baby's birth.

Handling

- To protect against possible infection (including blood-borne diseases) and to reduce the possible transfer of organisms, protective gloves should be worn when handling the placenta/POC.
- Ensure that cuts and abrasions are covered while you are handling the placenta/POC.
- Keep handling to a minimum and ensure that hands are thoroughly washed afterwards.

Burial and disposal

If you plan to bury your placenta/POC, this must be done in accordance with laws designed to protect public health. A placenta/POC is not considered 'bodily remains' in law but it is your responsibility to contact Local Government Councils and ask if there are any applicable guidelines in your area relating to planting, scattering, or burying the placenta or its ashes.

Once you take your placenta/POC from the hospital you are responsible for ensuring you meet local and legislative requirements relating to appropriate handling and disposal of your placenta. It is suggested you bury at least one (1) metre deep to prevent it being scavenged by animals.

Taking your placenta outside Australia

If you are wishing to transport your placenta/POC back to another country outside of Australia (e.g. New Zealand) it is your responsibility to discuss this with the airline you are travelling on to ensure you are meeting IATA Packing Instructions 650 which are the requirements for transporting a Biological Substance Category B.

Consumption/Encapsulation of placenta (placentophagy)

Some people choose to consume their placenta in any form such as 'fresh', capsules, tablets, or drinks reconstituted from powder for personal, spiritual or cultural reasons. There is no reliable evidence to support any health benefit and it is not recommended. There are some situations in which a placenta should definitely **NOT** be consumed.

These include situations where:

- The placenta was not stored in a fridge/freezer below 5° celsius
- The placenta has not been prepared within the recommended timeframe for consumption
- It is the patient's responsibility to ensure they are aware of preparation requirements including timeframes for consumption.
- The placenta is not your own
- Your placenta has been sent to pathology and therefore stored in formaldehyde and/or other toxic chemicals.

Wash all pots, pans and any utensils that have been used for preparing or cooking your placenta with hot water and detergent immediately after use. It is recommended that they are then washed in a dishwasher.

**For more information please contact Townsville University Hospital
Maternity Clinical Midwifery Consultant**

Phone: (07) 4433 4379