

Your Choice

Using a POOL during labour and birth

The POOL Study aimed to establish the safety of water birth for mothers and babies.



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The pool study



Summary

A research team at Cardiff University have been studying birth in water. This is a popular choice for women. We've put this information together to let you know about labour and birth in water, and what evidence this new study has added.

Many women find being in warm water helpful during labour.

Some women who use a pool during labour want to get out before birth, and others remain in the water for birth. And some women will need extra care which cannot be provided in water.

Overall, the POOL study found that water births are just as safe for mothers and their babies as giving birth out of water.

The aim of this study is to provide information that can help women and their families make choices about birth that are right for them.

Overall, the POOL study found that, in the UK, water births are just as safe for mothers and their babies as giving birth out of water.





What is a water birth?

A water birth is when a woman gives birth to her baby in a pool or large bath filled with warm water. Water births often take place in pools in maternity units within the hospital, alternatively, parents can also choose to have their baby at home in a pool that can be hired. Some maternity units can provide a pool for home use. Please chat to your midwife about all of the options available to you.





Why do women choose to use water for labour and birth?

Soaking in warm water during labour can reduce pain and helps makes contractions a bit more manageable. Some women find it relaxing. It can also make it easier to move around and find comfortable positions in labour. Some women labour **AND** give birth in the water, known as water birth and some women get out of the water before birth. On occasions women get out of the water following advice of their midwife.



Your choices

Every pregnancy and labour is different. If you are thinking about using a pool during labour talk to your midwife, who will know what facilities are available in your area and be able to help you talk through your choices.





Who gets in the birth pool?

You can decide whether you want your birthing partner to get into the pool with you, but most partners stay out of the water. Your midwife will stay out of the birthing pool and will be there to monitor and support you.





Are water births safe?

Around the world many women give birth in water, and water births have been an option in the UK for many years. Many parents, midwives and doctors are confident that being in warm water during labour is helpful and safe. But to help parents make informed choices about whether to give birth in the water more good quality research was needed.



The POOL study

The POOL Study run by Cardiff University aimed to answer some of the questions about the safety of water births for mothers and their babies.

The study included data about births attended by midwives from 26 NHS units. This included all births attended by midwives at home and in midwifery led units as well as births in the main obstetric unit in 26 participating NHS sites, between 2015 and 2022.



Who was included in the study

The study looked at what happened to a large group of women who had used a POOL or bath during labour or birth.

- The study included 87,040 women who used a pool during their labour or birth between 2015 and 2022 at 26 study sites.
- Over the study period 1 in every 10 women having a baby used a pool during labour.
- 73,229, or 8 out of 10 women in the study who used a pool, were healthy and at 'low risk' of developing labour complications.



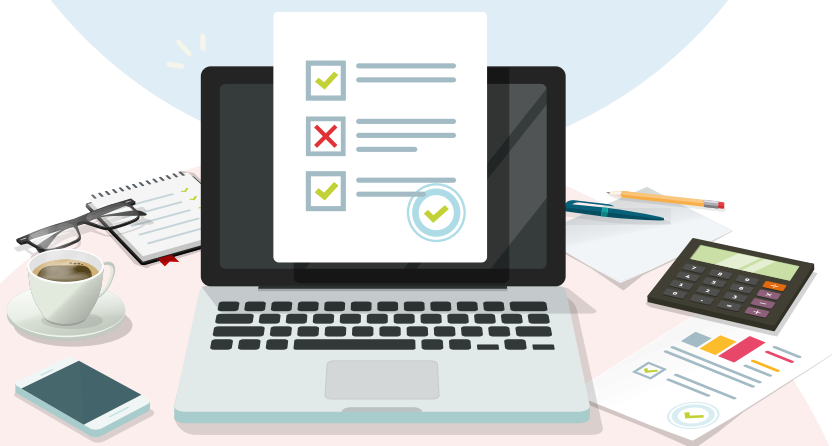
Our results



Overall, the POOL study found that water births are just as safe for mothers and their babies as giving birth out of water.

Key findings:

- The study found that water births did not lead to more serious tears during birth.
- The study found that water births did not increase the likelihood of babies needing extra care after birth.



What we found

In addition to overall safety, the study looked at outcomes which are important for mothers, babies and families.

Vaginal tears

The study looked at how many women experienced a serious tear to their vaginal area during birth. Deep tears that extend to the muscle that controls the anus (the anal sphincter) sometimes occur during vaginal births. This is known as Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury or OASI. OASI are important as they need to be repaired in a theatre, are painful and can result in long term problems such as incontinence. The study found that water births did not lead to more vaginal tears or OASI.

Babies needing extra care

The study also looked at how many babies needed extra care after birth. This included babies that needed antibiotics given through a drip, babies who needed help with their breathing on a neonatal unit, and the small but important number of babies who died during labour or shortly after birth. Even if a baby gets better quickly after birth and makes a full recovery, having an ill baby can be very upsetting for parents and other family members. The study found that water births did not increase the likelihood of babies needing extra care after birth.



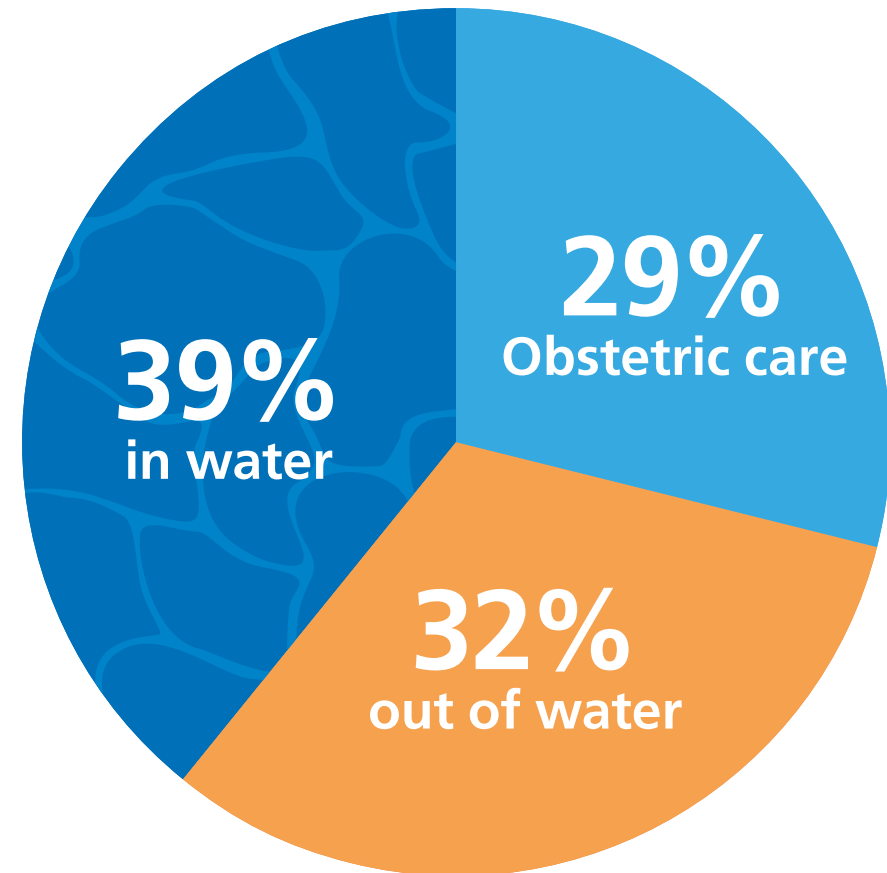
What does this mean for you?

Welcome First baby



Amongst women having their first baby who were healthy and at low risk of developing complications and who used a pool or bath during labour...

- Just over a third (39%) gave birth in water.
- Just under a third (29%) developed labour complications or chose to have an epidural or other pain relief given by an anaesthetist before birth. For women planning birth at home or in a midwifery led setting this would have included transfer to an obstetric unit.
- Around a third (32%) had an uncomplicated labour but gave birth out of the water.



Among the women expecting their ✓ **first baby** with ✓ **no pregnancy complications** who used a ✓ **birthing pool**



78 in every 100 women had a spontaneous vaginal birth

16 in every 100 women gave birth assisted by forceps or ventouse and

6 in every 100 women gave birth by unplanned caesarean section

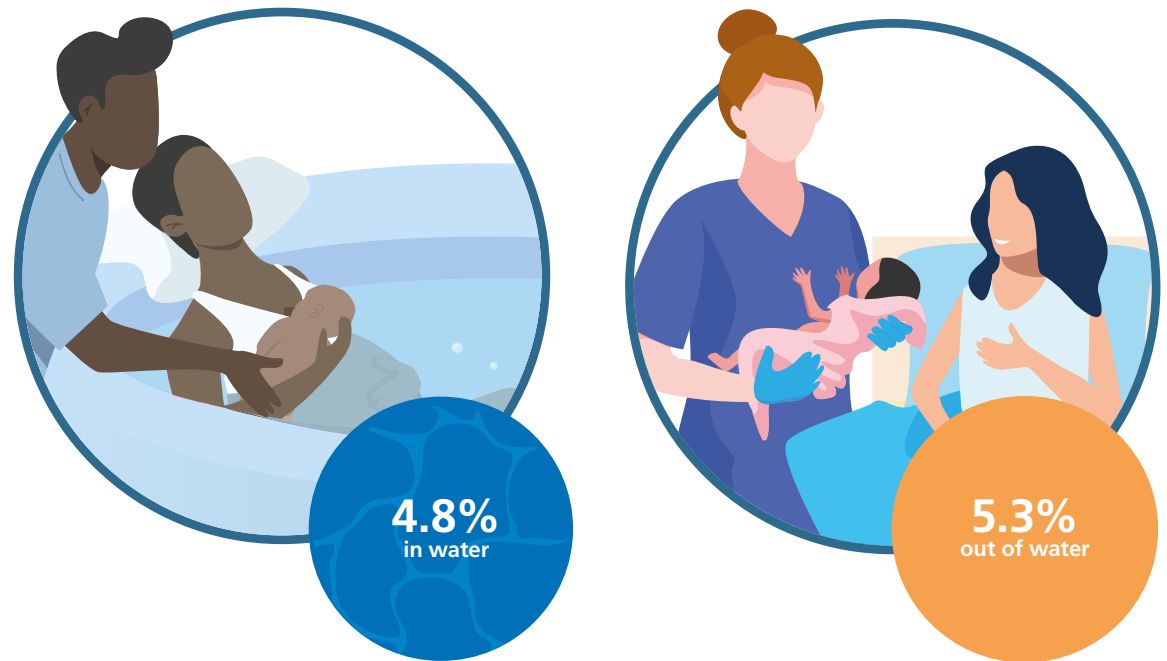
Water birth and Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury (OASI)

Birth outcomes for women having their first baby without complications during labour, were compared.

OASI Injury rates were lower among women who gave birth in water.

Among women having their first baby in water 4.8% experienced an OASI, compared to 5.3% of women having their first baby who gave birth out of water.

The study found that water births did not lead to more vaginal tears or OASI.



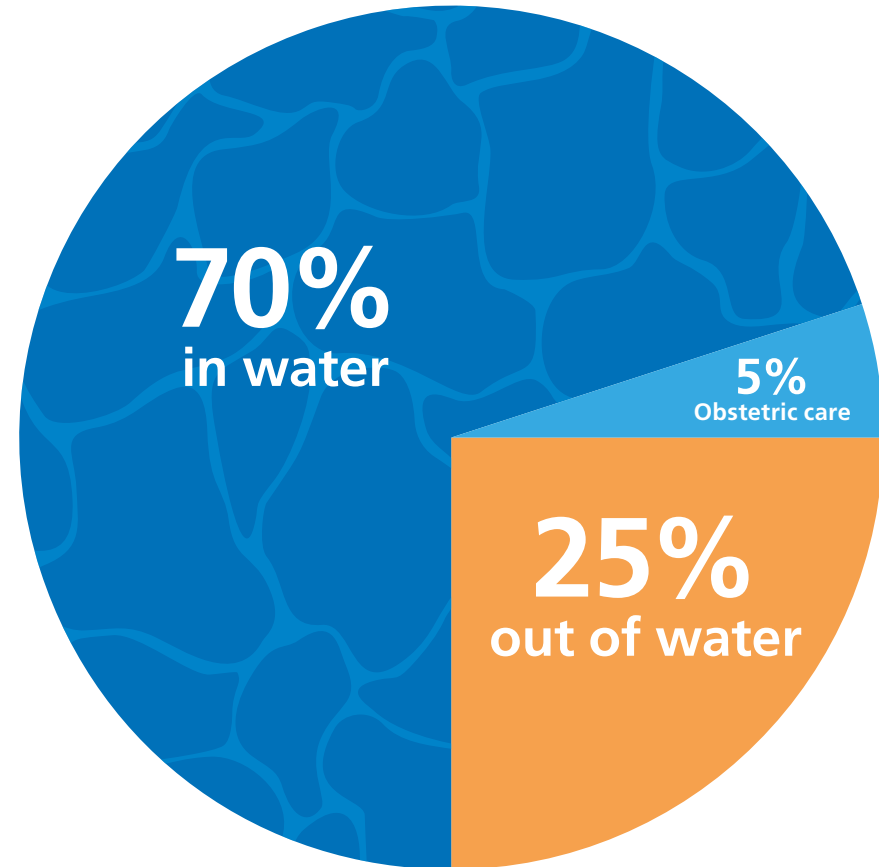
Welcome

Second, third or fourth baby



Amongst women having their second, third or fourth baby who were healthy and at low risk of developing complications and who used a pool during labour...

- 70% had an uncomplicated labour and gave birth in water.
- 25% had an uncomplicated labour but gave birth out of water through choice.
- 5%, around 1 in 20, developed labour complications before birth and needed obstetric care or chose to have epidural pain relief.



Among the women expecting their ✓ **second, third or fourth baby** with ✓ **no pregnancy complications** who used a ✓ **birthing pool**



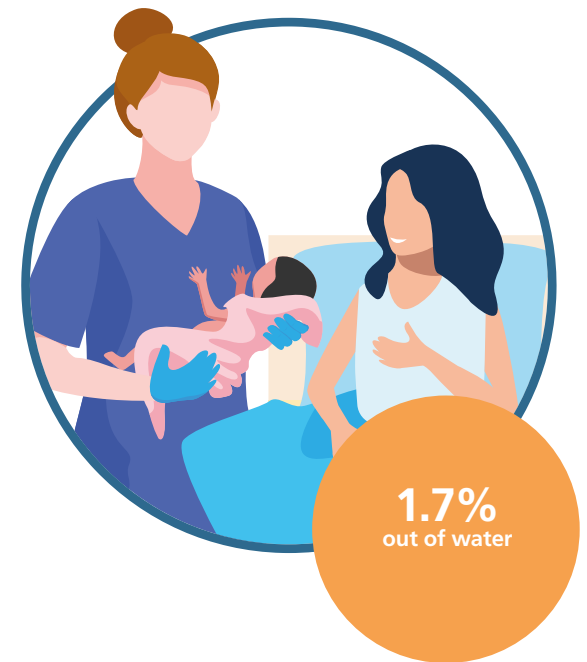
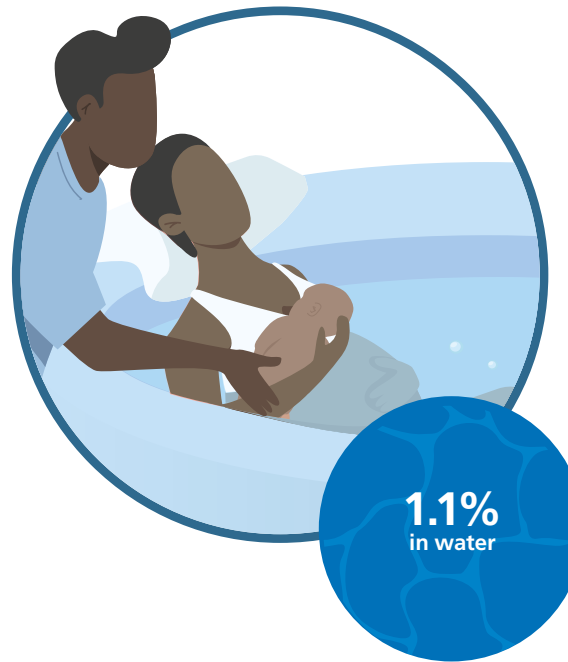
98 in every 100 women had a spontaneous vaginal birth

less than 2 in every 100 gave birth assisted by forceps or ventouse and

less than 1 in every 100 gave birth by unplanned caesarean section

Water birth and Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury (OASI)

- When the outcomes for women having their second, third or fourth baby without complications before birth were compared.
- OASI rates were lower among women who gave birth in water.
- Among women having their second, third or fourth baby in water 1.1% experienced an OASI, compared to 1.7% of women having their second, third or fourth baby who gave birth out of water.
- The study found that water births did not lead to more vaginal tears or OASI.



Impact on mothers

The study looked at other impacts on mothers and found that giving birth in water was no worse than giving birth outside of water.

- For example, giving birth in water did not lead to more difficulty in the birth of the baby's shoulders.
- Giving birth in water did not lead to more bleeding. Nearly 1000 women who had a water birth also delivered the placenta in water. This did not increase their chance of bleeding heavily.



What this means for babies born in water?

The study looked at how water birth affects babies and found that giving birth in water was just as safe as giving birth outside of water.

- Babies born in water did not need more resuscitation, antibiotics or any other extra care compared to babies born out of water.
- However we did find that more umbilical cords snapped during birth in water. This happened during 1 in every 100 births in water and in every 300 births out of water. None of the babies whose cord snapped needed a blood transfusion.
- Most of the ill babies were treated with antibiotics but did not need to be admitted to a neonatal unit. Baby deaths were very rare.



Overall, the POOL study found that, in the UK, water births are just as safe for mothers and their babies as giving birth out of water. We hope the results of this study can help women and their families to make informed birth choices that are right for them.



Summary

Water births in the UK attended by midwives are **safe for mothers and their babies.**



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