

**BRINGING OUR  
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HOME**



**First Nations Family Advocate Office**  
**Birth Alerts and Pre-Natal**

Bringing Our Children Home National Conference  
Treaty 1 Territory  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
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First Nations  
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## What is a birth alert in the province of Manitoba?

- In Manitoba there are two types of birth alerts:
  1. If you are over the age of 18 and is considered high risk; and
  2. If you are under the age of 18 and is an unmarried minor.
- A birth alert is when an Child and Family Services (CFS) agency or the mandating CFS authority completes and faxes either an alert or birth alert form to the interprovincial desk (located under each authority). The birth alerts can come from all over Manitoba.
- The difference is unmarried minors must be advised of their rights and to allow minors to request services by the agency. The intent of this section is to make sure that minor parents are advised of their right to request services by an agency under subsection 9(2) of the Act (Child and Family Services, *Standards Manual: Child Protection*).





## Who do birth alerts apply to?

- CFS agencies apply Birth Alerts to high risk expecting mothers in relation to the care they will provide for their newborn infant.
- Once the expected mother registers with a hospital, immediately a notice is on her file for hospital staff.
- The CFS agency will then confirm the mother and will possibly apprehend child at birth
- Every individual case is unique in regards to the concerns and capabilities of the parent(s).





## What is the role of the CFS agency?

The agency investigates if:

- There is an open case on mother and other children prior to birth
- There are any accusations against the mother involving CFS
- Family history (protection case)
- The agency is responsible for the apprehension of the newborn infant at the hospital in cases of birth alerts.
- The agency determines the placement after the apprehension (kinship, shelter, foster home).



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## **What are the hospital practices in relation to birth alerts?**

- The practice in Manitoba is to keep the newborn infant in the hospital until the agency has either lifted the birth alert or until apprehension.
- The information in regards to birth alerts in Manitoba is privileged information, only accessible to hospital staff (social workers) and agency workers.
- Information with the expecting parents will not be shared until the intervening agency makes first contact.







## What are the parent's rights?

- A parent has a right to care for their newborn infant (as long as there is no child protection concerns). It is the parents right to participate in decisions affecting their newborn infant and have a say in their placement - (this is when planning is important and when people/family should be identified to the worker for possible placement if an apprehension takes place).
- Parents have the right to not sign any forms or documents before speaking with a lawyer. The parents have the right to consult with a lawyer before you make any decisions related to CFS and their child. CFS may still apprehend because of protection concerns.
- All documents and checks that have been paid for by an agency is the agencies property and it will remain in the parents file. If parents require additional checks the cost will be covered by the parents.





## **Are expectant parent(s) notified of the birth alerts?**

- The practice in Manitoba is often to not notify the mother if a birth alert has been placed upon her and her unborn infant until the agency makes contact with the expecting mother.
- The agency is not obligated to inform the parent(s) of the alert, some mothers are notified only if they have children already in care.



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# **First Nations Family Advocate Office Response to Birth Alerts**



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# Response to Birth Alerts

- When our office is notified of a Birth Alert, usually from the expected mother or a family member, our team will attend the hospital that same day to offer supports to the family with the goal to avoid apprehension.
- The FNFAO team during birth alerts consists of:
  - The Advocate or Assistant Advocate
  - Grandmother
  - Prenatal and Postnatal support worker



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## Role of the Advocate and Assistant Advocates

- During a birth alert, the goal is to avoid apprehension. The Advocate will act as a liaison between the agency and mother to develop a plan so that the newborn can stay with mother. The advocates will provide supports to the mother and newborn to ensure that they are kept together.
- If we can not avoid an apprehension, the advocates will work with the mother to identify family members to care the child.
- In the meantime, the advocate will work with the mother regarding her case plan and develop a plan with the mother and agency for reunification.
- It is the goal that the newborn is placed with a family instead of placements in shelter or foster homes



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## Role of the Grandmother?

- Provides Emotional and Spiritual support
- Offer a song for the family
- A prayer for the child and family
- Gift the family with a pair of moccasins and a feather



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## Role of prenatal and postnatal support

- If our office is notified of a potential Birth Alert, the prenatal support workers will work with the expected mother to offer support and services on:
  - Traditional Parenting workshop
  - Sacred Babies workshop
  - Best care practices for prenatal and postnatal families
  - Provide families with support for a holistic approach to wellbeing
  - Empower families through cultural identity and connection to Elders
  - Individualized family assistance, hospital and labor visits, making nutritious meals



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## Welcoming the newborn Infant

- The parents can ask for the newborn infant to be washed with smudge water or cedar water, whichever is traditional for families. If the parents want to start their own family tradition, they can request this to be done by family/midwife and/or supports.
- Some facilities do accommodate smudging; it is important for parents to ask what are the rules regarding this. The birthing center allows for a small smudge while the infant is being born.
- A naming ceremony can be done for the newborn; it is important for clients to ask family/supports/advocate who could do this if their newborn is at risk for apprehension. This ceremony will keep the connection strong between mom and her infant.
- Parents can request the placenta to be given to the mother for a placenta ceremony.
- Parents can ask for the belly button to be kept so the mother can place it in a medicine bag. This signifies that the newborn will always come home, even if apprehended.
- The midwife can advocate for this type of traditional love, for the connection between a mother and her newborn.





# FNFAO Challenges

- Sharing personal information between hospitals and agencies without consent
- Response time
- Primarily issued for marginalized, disproportionately First Nations women
- Continuing the cycle of Intergenerational trauma



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# Questions & Answers



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