

The Rights of Childbearing Women

** At this time in the United States, childbearing women are legally entitled to those rights.*

*** The legal system would probably uphold those rights.*

1. Every woman has the right to health care before, during and after pregnancy and childbirth.
2. Every woman and infant has the right to receive care that is consistent with current scientific evidence about benefits and risks.* Practices that have been found to be safe and beneficial should be used when indicated. Harmful, ineffective or unnecessary practices should be avoided. Unproven interventions should be used only in the context of research to evaluate their effects.
3. Every woman has the right to choose a midwife or a physician as her maternity care provider. Both caregivers skilled in normal childbearing and caregivers skilled in complications are needed to ensure quality care for all.
4. Every woman has the right to choose her birth setting from the full range of safe options available in her community, on the basis of complete, objective information about benefits, risks and costs of these options.*
5. Every woman has the right to receive all or most of her maternity care from a single caregiver or a small group of caregivers, with whom she can establish a relationship. Every woman has the right to leave her maternity caregiver and select another if she becomes dissatisfied with her care.* (Only second sentence is a legal right.)
6. Every woman has the right to information about the professional identity and qualifications of those involved with her care, and to know when those involved are trainees.*
7. Every woman has the right to communicate with caregivers and receive all care in privacy, which may involve excluding nonessential personnel. She also has the right to have all personal information treated according to standards of confidentiality.*
8. Every woman has the right to receive maternity care that identifies and addresses social and behavioral factors that affect her health and that of her baby.** She should receive information to help her take the best care of herself and her baby and have access to social services and behavioral change programs that could contribute to their health.
9. Every woman has the right to full and clear information about benefits, risks and costs of the procedures, drugs, tests and treatments offered to her, and of all other reasonable options, including no intervention.* She should receive this information about all interventions that are likely to be offered during labor and birth well before the onset of labor.
10. Every woman has the right to accept or refuse procedures, drugs, tests and treatments, and to have her choices honored. She has the right to change her mind.* (Please note that this established legal right has been challenged in a number of recent cases.)
11. Every woman has the right to be informed if her caregivers wish to enroll her or her infant in a research study. She should receive full information about all known and possible benefits and risks of participation; and she has the right to decide whether to participate, free from coercion and without negative consequences.*
12. Every woman has the right to unrestricted access to all available records about her

pregnancy, labor, birth, postpartum care and infant; to obtain a full copy of these records; and to receive help in understanding them, if necessary.*

13. Every woman has the right to receive maternity care that is appropriate to her cultural and religious background, and to receive information in a language in which she can communicate.*

14. Every woman has the right to have family members and friends of her choice present during all aspects of her maternity care.**

Every woman has the right to receive continuous social, emotional and physical support during labor and birth from a caregiver who has been trained in labor support.**

16. Every woman has the right to receive full advance information about risks and benefits of all reasonably available methods for relieving pain during labor and birth, including methods that do not require the use of drugs. She has the right to choose which methods will be used and to change her mind at any time.*

17. Every woman has the right to freedom of movement during labor, unencumbered by tubes, wires or other apparatus. She also has the right to give birth in the position of her choice.*

18. Every woman has the right to virtually uninterrupted contact with her newborn from the moment of birth, as long as she and her baby are healthy and do not need care that requires separation.**

19. Every woman has the right to receive complete information about the benefits of breastfeeding well in advance of labor, to refuse supplemental bottles and other actions that interfere with breastfeeding, and to have access to skilled lactation support for as long as she chooses to breastfeed.**

20. Every woman has the right to decide collaboratively with caregivers when she and her baby will leave the birth site for home, based on their conditions and circumstances.**