

Pregnancy HELPFUL HINTS

Having a BABY in P.R.

~ From women who've "been there...done that" ~

WARNING: This guide is intended to be an informative and honest description of pregnancy and giving birth here in Puerto Rico. It is not meant to make anyone anxious, but simply to better prepare you for this life-changing event. Please reach out to your neighbors in RBH if you are nervous or have concerns about being pregnant or having a baby here - many of us have done it and we can help! But if for any reason you don't think you can stomach it, or you have a queasy stomach (...are you already pregnant??), then DON'T DRINK THE WATER and don't say "I'll NEVER get pregnant in P.R"! Because it's bound to happen, then...Ha! Ha!

Some of us have been brave (or is it crazy?) enough to arrive in P.R. already pregnant or get pregnant here on island. You may have even heard stories from when 'Rosey Roads' (Naval Base Roosevelt Roads in Fajardo) was still open. Well, it's not all bad now, but just different. Everything is done via civilian doctors and hospitals. You do also have the option of traveling back to the States early enough to switch TRICARE coverage areas and give birth near family—of course, keeping in mind that depending on your spouse's job/work schedule, he may not make it to see the actual birth. The biggest issue for most women seems to be the language barrier with nurses (all doctors should be fluent in English), so it may be helpful to learn a few Spanish phrases before the big day. "Tengo dolor, medicina por favor" means 'I have pain, please give me some medicine.' If you speak Spanish, but are not from Puerto Rico the following information about the medical system will still be useful. It shouldn't be hard to find someone here in RBH who has had a baby if you want advice, and hopefully you won't hear any scary stories. AND keep in mind that most moms still want to tell their 'battle wound' stories about 36 hours of labor whether they've done it here in P.R., or up on the moon! However, it may be helpful to know that some women who have had a baby here considered the hospital service to be on a most basic level - you have to bring many supplies yourself, you will not find midwives or large birthing rooms with a Jacuzzi tub for active labor, and nurses may not seem responsive due to understaffing.

Things to know:

- Currently all OB/GYN doctors at Clinica (as well as the 'high risk' doctors referred to at Ashford) are male; you can get a referral to see a female GYNE through your PCM.
- **ARRIVING TO P.R. PREGNANT:** The OB/GYN doctors at Clinica must have begun seeing you before you are 5 months along, or they will likely refuse to take you as a new patient. Sign up with TRICARE Prime Overseas ASAP and make an appt with your PCM to get a *referral* to see the OB - yes, it doesn't make sense since you probably were already seeing a doctor in the States for the pregnancy, but this is the procedure to get you into Tricare 'Overseas'. Talk to Nelly Lazu (787-729-2334, TRICARE Rep at the Base) for assistance. If you are further along or considered high risk, Nelly can help with finding another OB. Appointments for any doctor/specialist outside of Clinica will not be for a set time, and the wait will be long so be prepared (snacks, drink, magazine?).
- "Natural childbirth" in PR is not the natural, breathing through the pain, 'no drugs' experience some women hope for or would prefer - typically doctors here will break your water and administer Pitocin to get things moving. Pre-natal classes are available, but hard to find in English. One resident found a doula through her OB who provides private classes at your home as well as assistance with active labor in the hospital. (Carmen Rosa Suarez, home 787-721-1746 / cell 787-309-8772 - she speak fluent English and works for a price based on what you can afford. She can also give you a tour at Ashford & help you pre-register.)

- Epidurals must be planned for in advance and pre-approved via TRICARE so you are not asked to pay up front & submit for reimbursement on your own.
- Repeat C-section is the only option if you've already had one previously; they do not offer VBAC in P.R. After a C-section, recovery is done in the general surgical recovery area. The baby will be taken to the nursery and you/your spouse will not see the baby until you are moved to a maternity room.
- Nurses are understaffed and will be slow in making rounds to dispense pain medication post-delivery. It is important to plan to have someone (spouse/family/friend) who can advocate for you in the hospital and get the nurses' attention, if necessary.
- TRICARE does not cover the cost of a 'private room' (this is true even back in the States, however, there many hospitals only have individual rooms in maternity), but you can pay out of pocket. Advantage: your husband can stay the night; disadvantage: the baby will be taken to the nursery if you are alone at night, especially if you have had a C-section. In a shared hospital room, overnight guests must be female and your spouse can only see you and the baby during regular visiting hours.
- You will supply your own pillow, comforter, toiletries, maxi-pads, diapers, also bring a few soft baby outfits (front snap newborn t-shirts work well).
- It may be difficult to prevent your baby from receiving a pacifier or bottle of formula when he/she is taken to the nursery, and your spouse cannot accompany the baby for receiving shots.
- You may not receive much guidance from lactation nurses with learning to breastfeed your baby (possibly due to language barrier), but other spouses in RBH will be happy to help/offer advice.
- And LASTLY, remember that in the event of a medical emergency or complication, the Command is prepared to evacuate any CG dependents to a military hospital in the States, if necessary.

Pre-registering at Ashford Hospital:

1. Pre-registering admissions office at Ashford Hospital: 787-721-2160. Call for an appointment 1 month to 1 ½ months before due date. Park in the parking garage and then go to the lobby. Through the main entrance and turn left - admissions office is at the end of the hall. You will have to pay for a few things at this time, around \$75: the baby care kit, scrubs for the husband, and a thermometer.
2. Bring your prescription/pre-approval for the epidural and set this up as well, show the admissions staff the epidural approval and they will send you to the doctor down the hall to arrange it.
3. You can request a private room at this time, but they will not really know if one is available until that day. Your husband can return to admissions and request a private room once you have given birth.
4. Check in with Labor & Delivery (3rd Floor) first when you come in on the day you are in labor or being induced. Your husband will have to return to admissions to obtain your medical chart created during pre-registration. If you'd like a tour of Labor and Delivery, call Mrs. Pagan at 787-721-2160. You can do this at the same time as pre-registering, or any other day. Turn right past the admissions office and then go to the elevator just past the cafeteria (on your right), only one goes to the 3rd floor.
5. Parents-to-be Care Center: 787-721-2160 Mrs. Mayda Rodriguez
6. Hospital Stay: bring blankets for you & baby, pillow, slippers or easy slip-on shoes, nightgown/pajamas & comfortable robe to walk hallways. Also, personal hygiene products: toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, towels, shampoo, hairbrush, deodorant, sanitary napkins, tucks pads, lotion, Tylenol/Ibuprofen (nurses may not get to you when you need it), etc. Don't forget: going home clothes for you and baby, and the infant car seat.
7. TRICARE representative at Clinica Las Americas is Luis Candelaria at 787-789-1919 ext. 258. See him/call for pre-approval of epidural; OB/GYN should give you a prescription for it which you give to Luis. Just go back and pick up the info before heading to hospital for pre-registration. You only need TRICARE pre-approval of hospital stay if you are having a scheduled/repeat c-section (get this from Luis, as well).
8. Dr. Humberto Vazquez Oliveras is the doctor that does a circumcision for boys at the hospital. 787/ 727-2140 or 268-2277. Speak to your OB and try to get pre-approved ahead of time. If you cannot, pay the fee (\$250, cash/check) to the doctor and get reimbursed by TRICARE.

Birth Certificate and Social Security Card

Children born in Puerto Rico are automatically U.S. citizens. However, unlike many hospitals in the States, they do not automatically request the birth certificate & social security number for you. You will need to go to the Registro Demográfico office in Hato Rey. The baby does not need to be present, and one legal parent will need an I.D. (drivers license or Passport) and be sure you have the release paperwork from the hospital. . The address is: Calle Quisqueya #171, Hato Rey, PR 00917. Take Roosevelt Ave (like you're going past San Patricio to Plaza Las Americas. Continue straight past Plaza, under highway (18) and you will pass through a large intersection (a bit confusing, stay in middle lane to continue straight on Roosevelt). It becomes a 'divided' street, but look to make a left after about 2 blocks onto Calle America. The building is at end of the street ('T' intersection), and parking is on the right just before the end - you will get your parking for free by validating the ticket inside.

1. Birth Certificate: At the first information window, request the form for a birth certificate ("Certificacion de Nacimiento"). If you cannot bring someone who speaks/read Spanish (the form is not in English) you can request a translator, but you may do better getting assistance from someone else in the waiting area. [some Spanish/English words to help with the form - 'fecha' = date, 'padre' = father, 'madre' = mother, 'firma' = signature, 'nombre' = name, 'hija' = daughter, 'hijo' = son] Bring cash and plan to get several copies to avoid having to return at a later date - although you can in theory fill out a form & request one from off-island fairly easily?). Cost is \$5 for the first one & \$4 each additional copy.

Do not get into the (long) line marked off with rope - that is only for getting copies of documents already in their system. First go to the last windows and buy the stamps (added like the 'watermark' on the certificates), fill out paperwork and turn it all in at the first set of windows. Eventually they will call you back up, and you may even be led around through the door to sit with someone at a desk and review the documents before they are submitted. **MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS SPELLED CORRECTLY!** Changes will be very difficult to make in the future (some rule/law about no changes after 90 days?).

2. Social Security Administration: 1-800-772-1213, Mon-Fri 8am until 4pm. Closed on holidays.

You will only have to go to this office if you HAVE NOT received your child's social security card after 12 weeks. The card may have been lost in the mail, however, you do have to go in person to verify that your child is in the system. Print the form from the website, <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.pdf> and have it filled out before you go to save time. You also need to bring the birth certificate and form from the hospital (it was returned to you when you applied for the birth cert/ss card). Arrive as early as possible, and consider bringing a friend who speaks Spanish, if available.

Directions to Forest Hills Plaza: Turn right out of housing on to 177 east (towards Costco). Take right onto Avenida Main (next stoplight after Costco), then left at Hwy 2 just under the raised train platform. Follow Hwy 2 up overpass (flag-lined bridge & coliseum on your left), then left onto 167 at stoplight. Follow this down several stoplights and get onto Calle Forest Hills Marginal. It will be the 2nd light on 167 on your right. It's in the strip mall with Pizza Hut and Burger King. Office is on the 2nd floor, use the elevator.