

*In this document, we use terms such as “mother” or “father”. However, parenting takes on many forms and some parents may wish to use other terms. We also use “breastfeeding” while some prefer “chestfeeding”. If this applies to you, please let us know and we will respect the terms you identify with.*

What is a C-section?

A Caesarean section (C-section) is a type surgery to deliver of your baby through your belly (abdomen) and your uterus. This type of surgery is done by a doctor who specializes in Obstetrics. When you have a C-section, you will be given anesthesia to numb your belly and your legs, so you won't feel pain. Sometimes a C-section delivery is the safest way to deliver a baby.

When is a C-section needed?

C-sections can be planned or unplanned. Most unplanned C-sections happen because of problems that come up during labour. Some of the problems that can come up are:

- A labour that is slow to progress, or has stopped completely, even with the use of medicines to help move the labour forward.
- The baby's heart rate is either atypical or abnormal.

Sometimes, a C-section may be scheduled before labour starts. This is usually planned for 39 to 40 weeks of pregnancy. Some reasons for a planned C-section are:

- The mother has had a previous C-section or other surgery that cuts into the uterus.
- The mother has an infection that can be spread to the baby during vaginal birth.
- The placenta is covering the cervix which makes it unsafe for cervix to dilate.
- The baby is in a breech (feet down) position.
- The baby has a problem which makes it unsafe for it to be delivered vaginally.

Can a C-section be done in High River?

Yes. The High River Hospital has a team of obstetricians (surgeons who specialize in pregnancy medicine) and anesthetists (doctors who can give epidural, spinal, or general anesthesia) who are very experienced with both planned and unplanned C-sections. In some cases, you or your baby may need extra medical support, and transfer to Calgary may be recommended.

Are C-sections safe?

C-sections are a common surgical procedure, but it does carry different risks than a vaginal delivery. Compared to a vaginal delivery, there is a higher risk of heavy blood loss, blood clots, and injury to the bladder and bowel. Babies born by C-section can have trouble with breathing for a few hours after delivery, but this usually resolves on its own. After surgery, the recovery time can be longer for you, and there are special considerations for future pregnancies.

### What happens during a C-section?

Before your C-section, a catheter is inserted in your bladder and an IV line is inserted in your arm. In most cases, you will be awake for the procedure but will be given an epidural or spinal anaesthetic to numb your belly and legs. Rarely, in emergency situations, a general anaesthetic may be used. Once these preparations have been done, your birth partner can be with you in the operating room if you are awake. There will be a large sheet draped across your chest, so you won't see any of the surgery. In the operating room, there will be a team of nurses and an assistant who will help the obstetrician. There will also be a team to look after the baby, and this is usually a nurse and a doctor or midwife. The obstetrician will test to make sure you cannot feel pinching or pain in your belly before starting the surgery. Although you will be numbed to pain, you may still feel pushing and pulling, especially as the baby is delivered.

An incision will be made through the wall of your abdomen, an inch or two above the pubic bone, and the muscles of the abdomen moved out of the way. Next, an incision is made into the uterus and the baby is delivered. The incisions in the abdomen and uterus are usually horizontal. After the umbilical cord is clamped and the placenta is delivered, the uterus will be closed with dissolving stitches. The skin may be stitched or stapled.

If everything is going well at the time of delivery, the obstetrician will delay cord clamping for one minute and the baby can be brought over to you for skin-to-skin time. Just as with babies who are delivered vaginally, skin-to-skin contact helps the baby make the transition to life outside the uterus and helps to promote bonding and breastfeeding. In some cases, if there is concern about you or your baby after delivery, the umbilical cord may be clamped immediately and the baby may be brought to a warmer for assessment.

### What happens after a C-section?

After surgery, you will spend about an hour in the recovery area before returning to your room. Once the feeling has returned to your legs and you can walk to the bathroom, the bladder catheter can be removed. Once you are eating and drinking well, the IV line can also be removed. Most women stay in hospital for two days after a C-section. After you go home, it is common to need some pain medication for 1 to 2 weeks after delivery. Heavy lifting and exercise must be avoided for 6 weeks to allow the incisions in the abdomen and the uterus to heal properly. In future pregnancies, it may be possible to have a vaginal delivery. This will be an important topic of discussion for you and your obstetrician at your follow-up appointment, which is usually about six weeks after delivery.