

Entonox FAQs

Patients

What has happened?

In light of the concerns about high Entonox (gas and air) levels at other NHS hospitals, we had a duty of care to staff to test the atmosphere in our maternity unit. Our results have shown higher than recommended levels of gas and air in some delivery rooms.

We have therefore taken the difficult decision to protect our midwifery and medical team who are likely to be exposed to high levels of Entonox over long periods of time and suspend the use of Entonox.

What is Entonox (gas and air)?

Entonox (gas and air) is a colourless, odourless gas that is usually made up of half nitrous oxide and half oxygen. Entonox is an inhaled gas used as a pain medication and commonly used during childbirth. It typically takes effect within half a minute, and the effect lasts for about a minute.

What are the potential effects of Entonox exposure to patients?

Use for pain relief in labour is not considered as long-term exposure, therefore mums, partners and babies are not at risk.

What are the risks to our workforce?

There is limited research on the occupational exposure to Entonox, and the potential long-term health risks this may pose. It has a small risk of affecting the levels of Vitamin B12 in the bloodstream leading to nerve problems and may also have a potential impact on fertility or pose a risk for early miscarriage. These risks are unclear.

What are we doing to make Entonox available again?

In addition to improving the ventilation in the rooms, we are working hard to install specialist equipment to reinstate the use of Entonox as soon as possible.

The MedClair MDU is a machine that collects left over nitrous oxide from air we breathe out. It changes more than 99% of exhaled N2O into harmless Nitrogen and Oxygen. It is a mobile unit that remains on the floor in the room and will not impact on the ability to move around during labour.

When do we expect gas and air will become available?

This additional equipment should allow us to resume the safe use of gas and air as soon as possible. It is not possible to give an exact timeframe at present and reintroduction may need to be done in stages over the coming weeks. We will keep posting updates on our website, Maternity Facebook page and through the Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP). There is a Q&A session planned on Monday 3rd April at 1pm – please see the Maternity Facebook page for details.

What other options are available to support me during labour?

We have a variety of pain relief options available to you in labour when you come in. These include:

- the use of our midwife led rooms which offer birthing pools, complementary therapies, massage and birthing balls. The midwife led rooms provide a relaxed, calming environment and are available on the Delivery Suite and in the Abbey birth centre.
- TENs machines are available free of charge and can be collected from the Abbey birth Centre. If you are on the delivery suite your midwife can provide one for you.

- Other pain relief options are available, including paracetamol and Codeine, Meptid (Meptazinol) and Pethidine injections, Fentanyl PCA (patient controlled analgesia via an intravenous infusion) and epidurals. These options are available throughout labour. Please discuss your pain relief options on a one-to-one basis with your community midwife.
- Please see [this information leaflet](#) comparing the different pain relief options. We have 24/7 anaesthetic cover to support your pain relief needs.

Can I still have Entonox if I have a homebirth?

Our home birth service remains able to provide gas and air to women and families at their homes. This is because we can control ventilation more effectively in a suitable home setting.

I'm due to give birth in the next few weeks, what should I do?

Please speak to your community midwife or GP to talk through your concerns regarding the temporary suspension of Entonox/gas and air. You can adjust your birth plan and speak with your community midwife to discuss your homebirth options if you want. If you are considering transferring your care to another maternity unit please speak to a midwife who will be able to advise you how to do this. If you have already transferred your care or have made the decision to do so, please notify us via asp-tr.maternityreferrals@nhs.net