

## DONA International Statement on H1N1 - Mothers being denied support in labor -

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### **Jasper, IN (November 4, 2009)**

Hospitals all over North America are bracing for the unclear threat that the H1N1 virus may pose this flu season. Maternity units everywhere are contemplating what this may mean to women in labor and certainly newborns who are potentially being exposed to the virus.

While some hospital systems are making the drastic move to severely limit the number of support people women can have with them during labor, DONA International is calling for a reassessment of the doula client's rights to have the labor support they desire and deserve.

"Some hospital systems are forcing women to choose between their partner and their doula. This move is causing many women a great deal of stress and anxiety. It is illogical to believe that having an additional professional support person will significantly increase the risk to the mother or the baby. In the same way that we will continue to have nurses available to care for the mother's medical needs, we must allow women to get the emotional and physical support they require. Doulas have for many years been considered an integral part of the birthing team, and this has not changed simply because there's a new viral threat" says Susan Toffolon, President of DONA International.

DONA International is urging hospital systems to reconsider any policy that would exclude this crucial support person. DONA certified doulas and those working towards certification can provide documentation of their doula status. DONA International acknowledges the desire of all medical professionals to function in a way that reduces the potential complications from H1N1, but it does not believe that eliminating doula support is the answer. Doulas with flu-like symptoms should be calling upon their backup doulas to fill in for them and should be avoiding all contact with pregnant women and newborns.

DONA International realizes the impact this will have on both our doula members as well as your doula clients. Our recommendations include:

- Discuss with your clients the possibility that you may be prevented from entering the hospital to provide doula support.
- Discuss the possibility of your client sending a letter to the hospital administrator asking them to allow you to support her in labor.
- Discuss with your clients the possibility of choosing a birth site that supports their choice of using a doula as part of their birth care team.
- Review your contract with your clients, discuss the various scenarios that may occur and negotiate mutually satisfactory terms.
- Make provisions for backup doula coverage in the event you develop flu-like symptoms.
- Make sure you take these actions prenatally and NOT when your client is in labor!

We have received numerous calls and e-mails from our members wondering what can be done to support your clients. We are issuing a press release but also encourage you to send the press release to your local hospital administration in the hopes that exceptions will be made for doulas to enter hospitals and support their clients. It can be found on the DONA International web site at [www.DONA.org](http://www.DONA.org).

We have also received numerous e-mails about doula programs or doula (birth and postpartum) clients asking doulas to get the H1N1 vaccine. This remains a personal decision on the part of the doula and DONA International does not recommend that you accept or refuse to take the vaccine. We encourage you to weigh all your options and make the choice that is best for you.

We will continue to post any updates on our progress on our web site. If you have been affected by this issue as a doula, please let us know at the e-mail address below. We will need doulas willing to speak with local media to discuss this issue and assist with a resolution.

DONA International suggests doulas adopt additional safety and health measures, including:

- Frequent hand washing
- Avoid touching your nose, eyes or mouth
- Sneeze and cough into a tissue, or if one is not available, your arm rather than your hand
- Stay home if you have any symptoms (cough, fever, fatigue, sore throat, headache, runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea)
- Research your vaccine options
- Talk to the members of your health care team about ways to boost your immune system, which may include vitamin C, vitamin D, drinking enough water, cod liver oil, apple cider vinegar, getting adequate rest and certain homeopathic or herbal remedies.

The following links may provide additional information for your consideration and to provide to your clients inquiring about their options.

Options and positions on H1N1

[http://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/preg\\_H1N1fluvirus.asp](http://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/preg_H1N1fluvirus.asp)

Clinical data

<http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/news/QA/vteuH1N1qa.htm>

Dr. Sears' look at four vaccines, their manufacturers and recommendations

<http://www.askdrsears.com/thevaccinebook/2009/09/four-swine-flu-vaccines-approved-by-fda.asp>

Statistics on incidence and rate of complications (Canadian)

<http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/h1n1/H1N1-decision-aid.pdf>

Breastfeeding with H1N1

[http://www.ilca.org/files/in\\_the\\_news/press\\_room/Swineflu%20Listserv%20to%20ILCA%20Members.pdf](http://www.ilca.org/files/in_the_news/press_room/Swineflu%20Listserv%20to%20ILCA%20Members.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

For further information, or if you have been affected, please contact:

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