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Update on shortage of epidural pain control supplies

Dear expecting patient and family,

As you prepare for the birth of your infant(s), we want you to be aware of a North America-wide shortage of the supplies needed to safely give epidural pain control and epidural anesthesia during labour and birth. Epidural pain control/anesthesia involves a needle and a tiny tube, called a catheter, inserted into the lower part of your back. The needle is removed and the catheter left in place for delivery of medication through the tube as needed.

How does this supply shortage affect you?

This epidural supply shortage may affect our ability to offer you epidural pain control during your labour and the birth of your baby. However, if necessary, you will be offered other standard methods for pain control that are safe to use and effective in making your labour and birth experience as comfortable as possible.

During pregnancy there are several medical considerations in which the use of an epidural is the best or sometimes only safe and effective option for pain control in labour. We are working to ensure that our epidural supply is monitored and maintained so that we can safely support patients for whom these medical considerations present a risk. Kingston Health Sciences Centre is working to ensure that care teams are optimally utilizing existing epidural supplies while looking to secure additional quantities for the upcoming months.

What pain control options are available?

Your care team will carefully assess the appropriate options for pain control during your labor/ delivery and will discuss these options with you during your prenatal clinic appointment(s). Alternative pain control methods include:

- Medications administered into the spinal canal (medication injected around the nerves to numb the feeling of pain below a certain area of the body)
- Inhaled nitrous oxide gas (Entonox or “laughing gas”)
- Intravenous (IV) or intramuscular (IM) injection
- Local anesthetic nerve blocks
- Therapeutic touch, breathing and positioning techniques, water immersion, and other methods of managing pain without medication

These methods are all proven, safe and effective. For more information on pain management options, please see the information and links on our website at <https://kingstonhsc.ca/obstetrical-care/having-your-baby-kgh>.

Your clinical care team will do everything they can to keep you as safe and comfortable as possible. We will discuss with you all safe and available options, try to accommodate your wishes in labour as best we can and continue to provide you with the best care possible. Please talk to your care provider if you have any questions, and check the [KHSC website](#) regularly for updates on the epidural shortage and any impacts to patient care. This site is the best way to keep informed of the situation as it evolves over time.

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