

# Provision and uptake of routine antenatal services

## What is the aim of this synthesis?

The aim of this Cochrane qualitative evidence synthesis is to explore women's and healthcare workers' views and experiences of antenatal care. The authors collected and analysed all relevant qualitative studies to answer this question, and included 85 studies.

The synthesis links to the Cochrane Reviews of the effectiveness of different antenatal models of care ([Catling 2015](#) and [Dowswell 2015](#)). The synthesis was designed to inform [the World Health Organization guidelines for a positive pregnancy experience](#).



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## Key messages

Three areas of antenatal care are important to both women and service providers in all regions of the world. These are: the need to recognise and take account of the socio-cultural context in which care is provided; the need to ensure that service design and provision are appropriate, accessible, acceptable and of high quality: and that what matters to women and staff is personalised supportive care, information, and safety.

## What was studied in this synthesis?

Antenatal care is the health care women get while they are pregnant. During antenatal care visits, pregnant women are provided with support, reassurance, and information about pregnancy and birth, as well as tests and examinations to see if they and their baby are healthy. If any issues or problems are discovered, these can be managed during the clinic visit. If needed, women can be referred to other care providers. Different types of healthcare workers can give antenatal care. These include midwives, doctors, nurses, and, sometimes, traditional birth attendants.

The World Health Organization recommends that all pregnant women get antenatal care, but pregnant women do not always use this care. This may be because they do not think it is important, or because they cannot get to the healthcare facility. It may also be because the antenatal care they receive is of poor quality or because they are badly treated when they are there. By looking at studies of women's and healthcare workers' views and experiences of antenatal care, we aimed to learn more about what might help women to use antenatal care, and what might stop them using it.

## What are the main findings?

The review authors included 85 studies in their synthesis. Forty-six studies explored the views and experiences of women who were pregnant or who had recently given birth. Seventeen studies explored the views and experiences of healthcare providers, including lay or community health workers. Twenty-two studies included the views of both women and healthcare providers. The studies took place in eight high-income countries, 18 middle-income countries and 12 low-income countries, in rural and urban locations.

The review findings suggest that women use antenatal care if they find it is a positive experience that fits with their beliefs and values, is easy for them to access, affordable, and treats them as an individual. They want care that helps them to feel that they and their baby are safe, and that is provided by kind, caring, culturally sensitive, flexible, and respectful staff that have time to give them support and reassurance about the health and well-being of them and their babies. They also value tests and treatments that are offered when they need them, and information and advice that is relevant to them.

The review findings also suggest that healthcare staff want to be able to offer this kind of care. They would like to work in antenatal services that are properly funded, and that give them proper support, pay, training and education. They believe this will help them to have enough time to treat each pregnant woman as an individual, and to have the knowledge, skills resources and equipment to do their job well.

## How up-to-date is this synthesis?

The review authors searched for studies that had been published up to February 2019.

### Reference

Downe S, Finlayson K, Tunçalp Ö, Gülmezoglu AM. Provision and uptake of routine antenatal services: a qualitative evidence synthesis. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2019, Issue 6. Art. No.: CD012392. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012392.pub2.

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This summary includes key findings from research based on a Cochrane systematic review. This summary does **NOT** include recommendations.

### Cochrane systematic review

In systematic reviews you search for and summarise studies that answer a specific research question. The studies are identified, assessed and summarised by using a systematic and predefined approach.