

# Postpartum Care: Clinical Signs to Watch For

FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS



Confirm whether the patient has been pregnant, experienced a pregnancy loss or given birth within the last year. While many postpartum complications occur in the early weeks after delivery or pregnancy loss, some can develop anytime during the first year.

Review available prenatal and labour records to identify any clinical concerns from pregnancy or delivery that may require ongoing monitoring or follow-up.

Some patients may face barriers to care based on geography, culture, language or previous experiences in the healthcare system. Concerns about safety at home may also affect engagement in care. Clear, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed communication supports safe care.

For any patient who has been pregnant within the past year, consider the following questions to identify potential postpartum complications. Early recognition supports timely assessment and escalation.



## Is the patient experiencing excessive or worsening bleeding?

This may be a sign of postpartum hemorrhage or abnormal postpartum bleeding.



## Does the patient have elevated blood pressure?

This may be a sign of postpartum hypertension or preeclampsia.



## Is the patient reporting a sudden or severe headache?

This may be a sign of postpartum preeclampsia or other high blood pressure complications.



## Is the patient experiencing chest pain or pressure?

This may be a sign of a cardiac or respiratory condition such as pulmonary embolism or cardiomyopathy.



## Is the patient short of breath or finding it hard to breathe?

This may be a sign of a cardiac or respiratory condition such as pulmonary embolism or heart failure.



## Is the patient describing sudden changes in vision?

This may be a sign of a neurological or hypertensive complication.



## Is the patient experiencing strong or worsening abdominal pain?

This may be a sign of infection, hemorrhage or retained products of conception.



## Is there new swelling, warmth or redness in the face, hands, feet or in one leg?

This may be a sign of preeclampsia or Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT).



**Does the patient have a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, or feel very unwell?**

This may be a sign of a postpartum infection such as endometritis or mastitis.



**Is the patient experiencing severe or worsening fatigue?**

This may be a sign of anemia, infection or thyroid dysfunction.



**Has the patient fainted, felt near-faint or reported palpitations?**

This may be a sign of arrhythmia or cardiovascular instability.



**Is the patient reporting breast redness, warmth or swelling?**

This may be a sign of mastitis or another breast infection.



**Is the patient noticing changes with urination or in their vaginal discharge?**

This may be a sign of a urinary tract infection or postpartum infection.



**Is the patient expressing intense distress, persistent changes in mood or behaviour or thoughts of self-harm?**

This may be a sign of a significant postpartum mental health condition.



**Is the patient showing or reporting signs of substance misuse (e.g. intoxication, withdrawal or overdose or difficulty managing prescribed medications)?**

This may be a sign of substance-related complications.

If *any* of the above are present:

Assess and begin management within your scope and setting. Escalate care as clinically indicated based on patient stability, severity of findings and availability resources.

## Additional Supports

### Immediate Clinical Help

- Emergency Care: For severe or potentially life-threatening concerns, follow your local emergency response process to ensure timely and appropriate care.
- [SCOPE \(Seamless Care Optimizing the Patient Experience\)](#): A virtual, provider-only clinical navigation service for urgent access to specialists, hospital services and mental health supports. (This service is available only in some parts of Ontario.)

### Public Health or Community Follow-Up

- [Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program](#), offered by local public health units: Provides postpartum follow-up, home visiting, breastfeeding support, and family supports.