




Student midwives studying mechanisms of labor

Ancient Art, Modern Science

The word "midwife" is derived from Old English and means "with woman." Today's midwives must meet rigorous educational standards before being ready to provide care. In 1992, the New York State Legislature passed the "Midwifery Practice Act." This act formed a State Board of Midwifery; the Board is charged with assuring the safety of the public through licensure and regulation of midwives. To be licensed, a midwife must complete a state-approved, post-baccalaureate program that includes clinical experience and must pass a state licensing exam. New York student midwives learn at one of the four schools located in the state or at distance programs online.



Midwife Martine Jean-Baptiste of JJB Midwifery performs a newborn exam

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Midwives in New York State





Midwife Summer Knight at the Brooklyn Birthing Center
Photo by Laura Vladimirova, naturalbirthbebe.com

Hallmarks of Midwifery Care

Physiologic Birth:

- is characterized by spontaneous onset and progression of labor;
- includes biological and psychological conditions that promote effective labor;
- results in the vaginal birth of the infant and placenta;
- results in physiological blood loss;
- facilitates optimal newborn transition through skin-to-skin contact and keeping the mother and infant together during the postpartum period; and
- supports early initiation of breastfeeding.

Shared Decision-Making:

- a collaborative process that allows patients and their providers to make health care decisions together
- takes into account the best scientific evidence available, as well as the patient's values and preferences
- honors both the provider's expert knowledge and the patient's right to be fully informed of all care options and the potential harms and benefits
- provides patients with the support they need to make the best individualized care decisions and allows providers to feel confident in the care they provide



Skin-to-skin bonding. Photo by K. Michelle Doyle

What Midwives Do

Midwives are independent health care providers. They not only provide care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, but they also provide newborn care, family planning services, and routine gynecologic care from adolescence through menopause and beyond. As primary care providers, midwives perform annual exams, obtain Pap tests, prescribe medication, and treat common infections.

New York midwives do not need to be registered nurses. They are fully integrated into the medical system and maintain collaborative relationships with other providers. They have the authority to apply for hospital privileges, order diagnostic and laboratory tests, make referrals, and do not need to have written practice agreements.

Where Midwives Work

There are more than 400 midwifery practice sites throughout New York State, ranging from large inner-city hospital services to solo rural practices. Every year, New York midwives attend about 10% of births throughout the state. Midwives care for women and infants in hospitals, outpatient clinics, birth centers, private practices, and homes. New York State requires health care insurance plans and Medicaid to cover midwifery care services.



Midwives learning at a NYSALM Annual Meeting

Why Midwives?

The Midwifery Model of Care respects a person's right to make decisions that affect her health and to include her family in important life events. Midwives listen to their clients and encourage them to become educated about their choices and health concerns.

Midwives deliver comprehensive, competent, and personalized care; protect nature's wisdom; and intervene only if conditions deviate from normal.

Although midwives have the skill to support a woman who wants a natural childbirth, their clients also have access to modern technology, pain medication, and surgical intervention if necessary.