

## **MYTH BUSTER:**

### **Home Birth, What About the *Mess*?!**

Every midwife who attends home births has been asked this question countless times. As for me, I must admit it always takes me a second to understand the question before answering it. My brain asks: Mess? What mess?...Oh, *birth* mess? Pshaw! A non-issue.

I've attended many hospital births as a doula over the years. No one seems to be slightly concerned about the mess at the hospital. After all, they have countless staff members who must do something to make it all go away. They have the large garbage can with the fire engine red BIOHAZARD bag in it. There are piles of blue chux pads and a stack of cheap motel room towels and wash cloths. The bed itself is a technological wonder, what with its many transformations via button control and its ability to lose its bottom third in order to catch all "the mess" in a red Bio-bag lined bucket placed conveniently at the mom's behind. Everything is whisked away and no one gives it another thought.

At home, most people's beds don't transform into robots or tear away with a magical garbage can underneath. There's usually not a large staff waiting to take the garbage out (although often times, there is a friend or relative hanging around, making food, cleaning the kitchen, or just being a good support person). We don't have fire engine red Bio-bags, but I'm sure we could get them on eBay. Without all these things, the mess still seems very minimal.

I'll go into a quick, fictional narrative about what it is like for the midwife and her assistants regarding tending to "the mess". (This story only is only to reflect the perceived "mess" and not an actual birth, although some do flow like this one!)

We arrive at Ms. Superbirther's home at 9pm. She has a history of fast labors, and true to form, she's really working hard with contractions every 3-4 minutes. After listening to the baby, getting the mom's blood pressure and making sure she has everything we need, we set to work preparing the bedroom. From the birth kit and supplies we find a large vinyl shower curtain. We strip the sheets off the bed and cover the mattress with this vinyl gem from the Dollar Store. Then the sheets go back on—mattress protected. We pull out a few blue chux pads and place them at the mom's feet because she's really grooving in transition and her water could break at any time.

Next, my assistant opens two brown paper bags and stands them up on the floor, where she then lines them with plastic garbage bags. One bag is for linens, the other for trash. The mom thinks she wants to get in the shower for a little relief, so I put down a few towels on the tiles so she doesn't slip. There's a little bloody mucus running down her legs, which lands on the towels.

While Ms. Superbirther is in the shower, my assistant fills a crock pot full of hot water and five or six clean wash clothes. The crock gets placed near the bed and the tray with all of our supplies on it. After I listen to the baby again, Ms. Superbirther informs us that she needs to push. I help her towel off and walk four steps towards the bed before she

halts for a strong contraction and grunts uncontrollably with the pushing sensation. As the contraction ends, her bag of waters breaks and gushes clear fluids onto some of the towels. My assistant quickly grabs a few more chux pads and lines the mom's path to the bed. A couple more steps and another strong contraction takes over. This time Ms. Superbirther goes to her hands and knees on the floor, informing us the "baby is coming NOW!"

Quickly we get on gloves and pull the supply tray closer to us. Sure enough, we can see the top of the baby's head. The contraction ends and the mom wants to stay right where she is. I pull a hot compress from the crock pot and apply it to the mom's perineum as she begins another contraction. As she pushes, a little feces comes from the mom as well. I gently wipe it away with the compress, discard it in the linens bag, and change my gloves before grabbing a fresh compress. With the next contraction, the baby's head is born. There's a little mucus coming from its nose, which my assistant wipes away with sterile gauze from the supply tray and then discards in the garbage bag.

There are plenty of blue pads under Ms. Superbirther as she gets another contraction. With this, she pushes the rest of her baby out, with a small splash of amniotic fluid that lands on the pads. She takes her baby into her arms and laughs and cries in joy. My assistant uses a soft receiving blanket to rub and dry off the crying newborn. The blanket is then placed in the dirty linens bag. Dry, clean blankets and a hat are placed on the baby to keep her warm.

There's minimal bleeding from the mom. After 15 minutes and a handful of small contractions, Ms. Superbirther pushes her placenta out into a blue pad-lined bowl. The cord is clamped and cut, and the placenta is taken away to be examined by the assistant. We help both mom and baby into the vinyl-covered bed on top of a blue pad. Her bleeding is minimal to normal as her uterus continues to contract down.

Seeing that mom and baby are stable and well, I put on another pair of gloves and pick up all the blue pads from the floor. I ball them up and place them in the garbage bag. Next, I scoop up the damp towels from the bathroom floor and tuck them into the linens bag, along with the wash cloth compresses.

Ms. Superbirther wants to keep her placenta for planting a tree atop of in the Spring, so once it has been examined, my assistant carefully triple bags the placenta and places it in the mom's freezer, then discards her own gloves in the garbage bag.

After looking over mom and baby very thoroughly, we draw a lovely, healing, herbal bath for the two of them. While they are in there, we remove the vinyl from the bed and change the sheets. We place a blue pad back on the bed for the mom to lay on after her bath. Next, we bundle up all the linens and my assistant takes it away to the washer for its first round of cleaning. While she's busy with the laundry, I pick all the trash in the room, the glove wrappers, the gauze papers, one more blue pad and so on. I double-bag this and place it in a garbage can with a tight lid.

With the bedroom all cleaned up, Ms. and Mr. Superbirther and baby are ready for a snack and a good night's sleep. We help Ms. Superbirther into her favorite cotton underwear and a big overnight pad and tuck them all into bed.

Now, does that seem so messy? It doesn't to me.

Then again, I didn't go into this work to ponder the mess potential. Watching miracles unfold is much more wondrous. –Amanda Topping