

Definition

For the purpose of this guidance, a “Concealed Pregnancy” may be revealed late in pregnancy, in labour or following delivery and would be deemed “concealed” if the mother knows she is pregnant but has told no professional or health agency of this. It can also be deemed as concealed if mother has told a professional but has reported to be receiving ante-natal care when she is not.

When considering a pregnancy, this would also be deemed concealed if the pregnancy has been denied. A denied pregnancy is when a woman is unaware of or unable to accept the existence of her pregnancy. In some cases a woman may be in denial of her pregnancy due to mental illness, substance misuse or as a result of a history of loss of a child or children.

A pregnancy will not be considered to be concealed or denied for the purpose of this procedure until it is confirmed to be at least 24 weeks. However, it is recognised that given the nature of concealment or denial, it is not possible for anyone suspecting a woman is concealing or denying a pregnancy to be certain of the stage the pregnancy is at.

There can be several different reasons for a pregnancy being concealed including; the mother having a learning disability or because the pregnancy has been as a result of rape, sexual abuse or because the relationship has been violent.

What would be worried about if a pregnancy has been concealed?

If a pregnancy is concealed, this would mean there has been no ante-natal care received prior to the birth of the baby.

Possible implications:

- Concealment of a pregnancy can lead to a fatal outcome (for both mother and/or child), regardless of the mother's intention;
- Concealment may indicate uncertainty towards the pregnancy, immature coping styles and a tendency to dissociate, all of which are likely to have a significant impact on bonding and parenting capacity;
- Lack of antenatal care can mean that any potential risks to mother and child may not be detected. It may also lead to inappropriate advice being given, such as potentially harmful medications prescribed by a medical practitioner unaware of the pregnancy;
- The health and development of the baby during pregnancy and labour may not have been monitored and foetal abnormalities not detected;
- Underlying medical conditions and obstetric problems will not be revealed;

- An unassisted delivery can be dangerous for both mother and baby, due to complications that can occur during labour and the delivery;
- Lack of maternal willingness/ability to consider the baby's health needs, or lack of emotional attachment to the child following birth;
- Where concealment is a result of alcohol or substance misuse there can be risks for the child's health and development in utero as well as subsequently;
- There may be implications for the mother revealing a pregnancy due to fear of the reaction of family members or members of the community;
- Risks to the unborn baby from prescribed medications.

Risk Indicators

- Previous concealed pregnancy is an important indicator in predicting risk of a future pregnancy being concealed;
- Previous termination, thoughts of termination and/or unwanted pregnancy;
- Loss of a previous child (i.e. adoption, removal under Care Proceedings);
- General fear of being separated from the child.

