



Taking your placenta (tissue) home for burial

TAKING YOUR PLACENTA (TISSUE) HOME

Tissue that has been removed from your body is considered by health authorities to be contaminated tissue.

However, there are some instances where people feel strongly that they wish to take the tissue home and bury it. This usually relates to placenta tissue.

In most cases it is fine to take your tissue home as long as you can follow the basic health precautions, which are outlined below.

Sometimes the tissue will need to go to pathology for further examination, which means you won't be able to take it home immediately. Whether you take it home or not depends on the kind of examination required.

Your midwife/doctor will be able to give you information about your particular circumstances and will ask you to sign a release form.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

This information is intended to guide you through what you must do if you are taking your placenta home for burial.

You should be aware for your health and safety and for others in your household of some standard precautions. It is also important that you bury your placenta in accordance with laws designed to protect public health.

Human tissue provides a perfect environment for micro-organisms to grow. These may be a threat to the health of human beings.

In order to lessen this risk of infection you need to take the following steps:

- If no pathology examination is required, the tissue will need to be double wrapped in yellow clinical waste plastic and placed in a leak-proof, sealed container to transport. The staff at the hospital will do this for you.
- Once sealed in the container, the container must not be re-opened on hospital premises.

It is a criminal offence to bury 'bodily remains' anywhere other than in a public cemetery, unless the Secretary of the Department of Health has granted approval.

However, there are exceptions where tissues are not considered 'bodily remains' by law and may be buried at home. One of these exceptions applies to taking your placenta home for burial.

Human tissue must be incinerated at a high temperature or buried at a significant depth and not placed in domestic or council waste bins. It is your responsibility to understand and follow your local council's applicable guidelines.

The tissue will rapidly deteriorate, so it needs to be taken home as soon as possible and stored in a cool place. It should be stored in a refrigerator that does not contain any food and for no more than 48-72 hours before burial.

Another alternative is to keep the tissue in its container, on ice and in an Esky, for no more than 48 hours prior to burial. The Esky will require a thorough clean with warm soapy water after this use.

While the risk of getting an infection from healthy tissue is not high, standard hygiene precautions should always be followed. To reduce the possible transfer of organisms, cuts and abrasions should be covered when handling the tissue.

Protective gloves should also be used and hands well washed after handling or burying the placenta. Keep handling to a minimum to avoid exposure to organisms. Avoid eating or smoking around the placental tissue.

The tissue will need to be buried in a hole that is at least 1m in depth to prevent it being scavenged by animals and becoming a potential source of infection to humans. It must not be buried near a waterway.

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REQUESTING TO TAKE YOUR TISSUE HOME

This information is intended to guide you through what you must do if you are taking your placenta home for burial.

You will need to complete and sign the 'Tissue Request and Release Form' to indicate you understand the public health issues associated with your request.

If your tissue has been sent to pathology for examination we will need your contact details. When the pathology laboratory has completed the testing, your tissue will be returned to the hospital. We will then phone you to collect.

To prevent deterioration it may be necessary to freeze your tissue.

If you do not understand this information, you are welcome to discuss your issues with our clinical staff before signing the release form.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ADVICE:

Find your local council by visiting the Local Government Victoria website at:
www.viccouncils.asn.au/find-your-council

Human Tissue Act (1982)
www.health.vic.gov.au/legislation/human-tissue-act-1982