

Cervical ripening at home or in hospital during induction of labour: the CHOICE prospective cohort study, process evaluation and economic analysis

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language which may offend some readers.

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Labour is often started artificially. This is called induction of labour. Induction of labour is usually planned when it is safer to end the pregnancy. The first stage of induction of labour – ‘cervical ripening’ – means using medication or a balloon to open the neck of the womb. Years ago, cervical ripening only happened in hospitals, but now many women are offered ‘home cervical ripening’. This means that induction of labour starts in hospital then women go home while the treatment starts working. This could mean that women spend less time in hospital. They may prefer to be at home. However, home cervical ripening may be less safe because problems may not be noticed as quickly.

We looked at whether home cervical ripening is safe, acceptable to women and their partners, and good value for money. We used information about women and babies that is usually stored in electronic maternity notes. We studied women who had induction of labour in 26 United Kingdom maternity hospitals. Women were told about the study and could choose not to be included.

Our main question was ‘does home cervical ripening increase the chance that a baby needs care in a neonatal unit, compared with cervical ripening in hospital?’ We surveyed women about their experience of induction of labour and any financial costs to them. We interviewed women, partners, doctors and midwives to hear what they thought about home cervical ripening.

Fewer women than expected had home cervical ripening. We could not be certain that home cervical ripening with a balloon is as safe for babies as cervical ripening in hospital using medication. Home cervical ripening cost almost £1000 less per woman than in-hospital cervical ripening. Home cervical ripening was acceptable to women when they felt well looked after, when maternity staff communicated well with them, and when they felt they had a choice about going home.

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This article

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