

Rush HOUR

Should you worry about delivering in the car? It happened to these couples

Because labor rarely happens as you imagine, doctors recommend having a flexible birth plan. But not making it to the hospital? Well, even though it's extremely rare, pregnant women have faced the daunting task of having their baby on the way there.

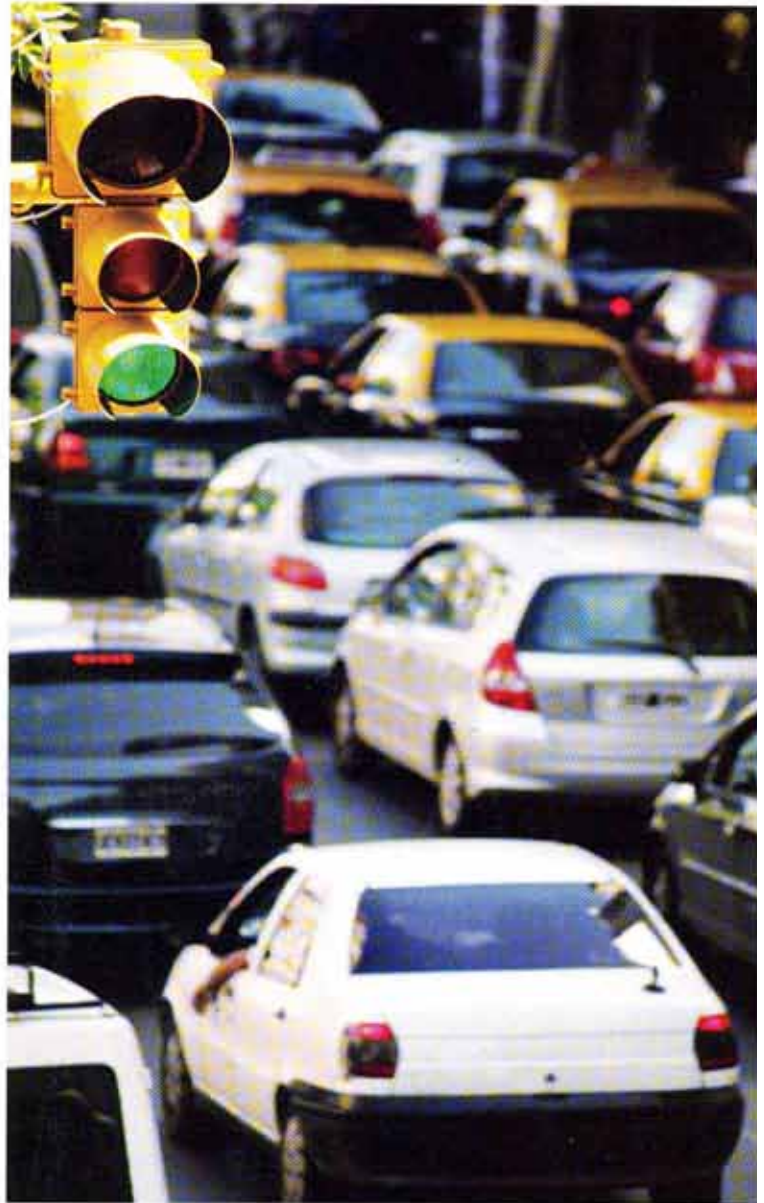
Take Christina Liceaga, of New York City, who was intent on laboring at home, knowing the hospital was a short distance from her apartment. Because her previous two deliveries had been induced, this time she was determined to have a more natural experience.

Although Liceaga went to the hospital in early labor, she requested to be sent home because her contractions were mild. Later on, back at her apartment, she found she could barely stand. Once she got into their SUV with her husband, Ulises, at the wheel, she knew this baby wasn't going to wait. "Don't stop at any lights!" she yelled.

Madeline Liceaga was born on 58th Street in the back of the Suburban. While Ulises drove and offered advice, Christina, with one knee on the floor and one out to the side, delivered her own child. They reached the hospital shortly after with the healthy baby girl. "I guess this is just the way it was supposed to happen for us," Christina says. "Fear just wasn't an option."

IS IT TIME YET?

In general, women can count on their second and third labors being much faster than their first. But many doctors recommend that first-time moms don't leave for the hospital until the initial stages of active labor (see "Ready, Set...Go?" on p. 46). The only exception is if your water breaks; then



BY ■ CORINNE GARCIA

you should call the hospital right away.

Sarah McMoyler, R.N., author of *The Best Birth*, also recommends that birth partners observe the laboring woman's disposition to determine when it's time. "You will see her affect change," she says. "Her shoulders are rising; her brow is furrowing; she's holding her breath."

Once a woman can no longer talk or walk through a contraction, McMoyler suggests heading out the door (always call the hospital first). McMoyler adds that it's



imperative for couples to factor in their location. "Do you have bridges to cross? What is the time of day and traffic pattern?"

Waiting at home might not have been a big deal if Ariane Coleman lived close to the hospital, but it's an hour's drive from her home in Big Sky, MT, to Bozeman Deaconess Hospital. And Coleman's first labor was speedy—her son Orrin was born four hours after her water broke.

But when Coleman finally sat down and called her doctor during her second labor, her contractions were only two minutes apart. She and her husband, Ben, had barely made it past their driveway before she started feeling extreme pressure in her lower abdomen. About 10 miles down the road, her water broke. "Pull over!" she hollered. "We're having the baby right here!"

With Ben's help, Chloe Coleman was born in the front seat of the pickup. Ariane delivered the placenta on the way to the hospital, and the Colemans arrived with a healthy baby in their arms. "I'm a very realistic, rational person," Ariane says. "I don't know what I was thinking leaving so late."

BUILT FOR SPEED

McMoyler recommends that women who had a speedy first birth head to the hospital at the first signs of labor for their subsequent deliveries. Some women are more susceptible to fast labors, McMoyler explains, but the traits are often difficult to detect. If all the women in your family had fast first births, this could mean that your delivery will be speedy, too.

If you're in labor en route and feel extreme pressure, call 911 for guidance and to prep the hospital staff. If the baby comes, make sure he's crying well to ensure his breathing passage is clear, advises Susan Connell, the maternal newborn manager at Bozeman

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Ready, Set...Go?

Here's a roundup of the pre-pushing stages of labor for first deliveries.

EARLY LABOR

- Mild to moderate contractions every 7 to 20 minutes, lasting for 30 to 60 seconds; the pains gradually get closer together
- Can last hours or days

ACTIVE LABOR

- Moderate to intense contractions every 2 to 3 minutes, lasting for 60 seconds; it's difficult to walk and talk through them
- Lasts 5 hours on average for first-time moms; head to hospital at its start

TRANSITION

- Very strong contractions every 1 to 2 minutes, lasting for 60 to 90 seconds
- Averages about 1 hour for first-time moms and directly precedes pushing

Deaconess; if not, you may need to give him a gentle pat on the back or lightly flick a foot. Keep him warm by cranking the heat in the car and wrapping him in a blanket or shirt on the new mother's chest to start breastfeeding immediately. Don't cut the cord—this isn't necessary and could cause risky bleeding.

Don't panic: First-time moms shouldn't add delivering in a taxi to their list of worries. Out of the 1,200 annual births in her area, Connell reports only 1 to 2 deliveries occurring on the way to the hospital.

"You will be very hard-pressed to find a first baby accidentally born out of the hospital," McMoyler says, "because they notoriously take their sweet time coming to planet Earth." ☺

Corinne Garcia just experienced a much faster birth with her second child this past July. She is a freelance writer and editor living with her family in Montana.

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