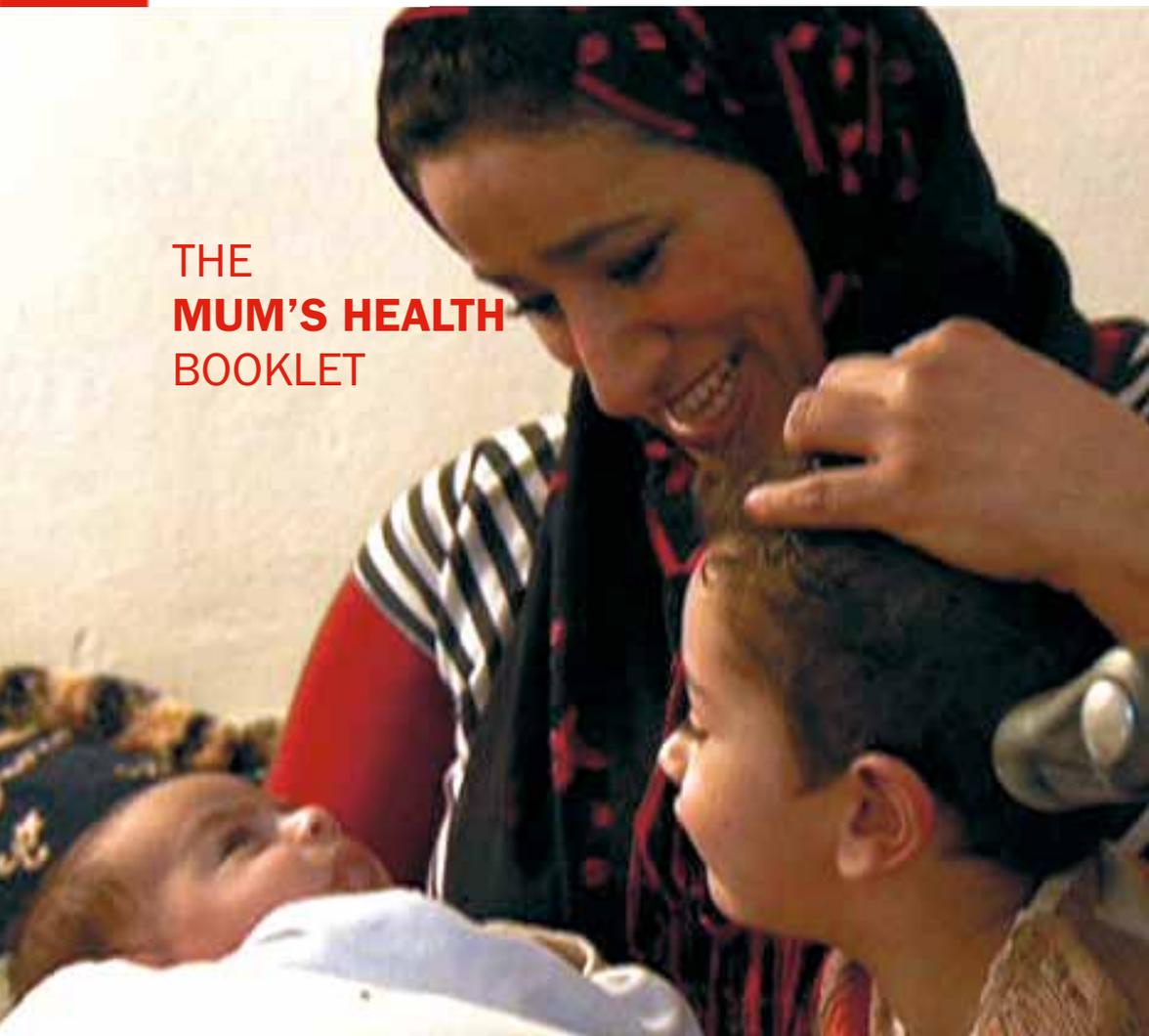




Regione Toscana

Diritti Valori Innovazione Sostenibilità

THE
MUM'S HEALTH
BOOKLET



THE MUM'S HEALTH BOOKLET

We are grateful to the immigrant women and men, the mediators, the translators and the health care operators for all their help.

Ideazione e testi

L'Albero della Salute,
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Michele Grandolfo, Angela Spinelli,
Serena Donati, *Istituto Superiore di Sanità*

Traduzione: Bridget Mason

Revisione: Janet Lenart

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THE HEALTH ADVISORY CENTRE



What is the health advisory centre?

It is a facility available throughout the area, created for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting psychophysical and social health – i.e. relating to the body, how one feels and how one is coping with the outside environment – for women, cou-

ples, adolescents, boys and girls, be they Italian or foreign. Even women without residence permits have the right to make use of the health advisory centre. Access to the health advisory centre and its services is free, although a ticket may need to be purchased for some specialist gynaecological services.

Why might I want to visit the health advisory centre?

- Pregnancy
- Help following delivery and support during breastfeeding
- Contraception
- Elective Termination of Pregnancy (IVG)
- Cancer prevention (pap-test)
- Emotional and sexual education
- Eating disorders
- Family mediation, providing support in cases of separation and divorce
- Fertility, infertility
- Custody and adoption
- Violence and maltreatment towards women and minors, both physical and mental harm, injury to feelings, which may provoke emotions and reactions (for example, being constrained to carry out or submit to sexual acts of various kinds or instances of domination and intimidation)
- Support for couples and families living in difficult socio-economic conditions
- Psychological disorders, i.e. illness and suffering in relation-

ships with oneself and/or others at certain times of life (adolescence, pregnancy...)

- Paediatric vaccinations and community paediatricians
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Menopause
- Legal advice
- Advice on anonymous childbirth (Mamma Segreta)

Who works at the health advisory centre?

There is usually a team of workers in health advisory centres encompassing a wide range of different expertises: health, psychological and social. Some health advisory centres also have cultural mediators available to help foreigners get to grips with the health services and treatment options that may differ from their country of origin and to facilitate reciprocal understanding with the sociohealth operators.

How do I go about being seen at the health advisory centre?

Anybody can go to the health advisory centre without an appoint-

ment or medical prescription. You will be able to see a member of the health advisory centre staff the same day and be given a suitable response to your needs, as well as an opportunity to make medical appointments if necessary.

Anonymity, confidentiality and professional secrecy are guaranteed. Furthermore, staff are prohibited by law to divulge any clandestine situations. You may visit the centre

even if you do not fully understand the legislation or how the system works. A list of all the regional health advisory centres can be found at the end of this booklet.

Which other sociohealth services are health advisory centres linked to?

The health advisory centre collaborates with all the regional and hospital services.



PERCORSO NASCITA / PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH



What should I do if I think I am expecting a child?

If menstruation does not occur when expected, if it is very light or different from previous cycles, you may wonder whether you might be expecting a child. Sometimes there may be other symptoms, such as morning sickness, vomiting and a need to urinate frequently. You

should take a clinical pregnancy test so that pregnancy can be confirmed. All women have a right to care during pregnancy.

Who can I turn to if I am expecting a child?

You can go to the health advisory centre and show them the certificate of pregnancy issued by your

gynaecologist or family doctor, and they will give you your pregnancy record book. The pregnancy record book will be needed for all the check-ups and tests that need to be carried out periodically, during the gestation period, including the 3 scans. All the tests detailed in the record book are free and ensure that your pregnancy is carefully monitored. You must bring the record book along to every check-up and keep the test results in the folder.

What am I allowed to do during pregnancy?

You must avoid excessive stress during pregnancy, avoid heavy work, especially night work, take more rest breaks and get more sleep.

It is important to eat a healthy and varied diet, including a lot of fresh, well-washed fruit and vegetables, well-cooked meat and fish and to avoid pre-packed and fried food, sweets and desserts.

You must drink a lot of water, refrain from smoking and avoid alcoholic

drinks. Medication should only be taken on your doctor's advice.

Can I carry on working during pregnancy?

Italian legislation (d.lgs.151/2001) protects workers with valid paid employment contracts and provides that:

- they cannot be sacked while pregnant or before the child has passed its first birthday;
- they have the right to stay off work on full pay for the last two months of pregnancy and for three months after the child's birth (or the last month and four months after the birth);
- they may stop working earlier, should their working conditions pose a risk to the health of mother or child or should health problems for either arise during pregnancy.

What should I do if I have any concerns during pregnancy?

Right from the very beginning your body will be changing: if you are worried, do not hesitate to come

and see the obstetrician at the health advisory centre.

What is the 'prenatal diagnosis', i.e. the series of investigative tests that, in medical language, includes chorionic villae sampling, duo-testing and amniocentesis?

These are tests carried out during the early months of pregnancy in order to identify abnormalities and malformations in the baby as early as possible. They are not obligatory and can only be provided free of charge in certain cases. These tests carry a risk of miscarriage, although this risk is very low.

Can I attend antenatal classes?

Health advisory centres run free antenatal and postnatal classes which are open to all, even if you are an irregular immigrant. These classes provide information on childbirth from a physical and a psychological point of view, techniques to help you cope with the pain of labour and delivery, nutrition, breastfeeding and anything else that relates to baby care.

There is a lot to be gained from taking part in these classes, where you will meet other mothers and swap information and make friends.

Where and how can I give birth?

You can choose where to give birth, free of charge, safely and respectfully of your own culture, in one of the Punti Nascita in Tuscany. These are hospital facilities equipped for childbirth.

There are several different ways of giving birth: lying on a bed; active childbirth, when you can choose whichever position you find most comfortable and which enables you to cope best with the pain and tiredness; water birth and childbirth with analgesia (epidural), which will allow you to manage the pain while remaining conscious during the birth. You can ask the staff at the health advisory centre and at the Punto Nascita about the options open to you at the facility you will be booked into. You may have a person of your choice with you during labour and birth.

Home births can sometimes be arranged, but the risks must be carefully weighed up by the health workers.

Might I have to have a caesarian section?

If problems arise that prevent the baby being born naturally, a caesarian section may be deemed necessary. This is a surgical intervention, carried out to the mother's abdomen, under general or local anaesthetic while she is awake. Women who have had caesarian sections in the past can still try to have natural births with subsequent children.

Caesarian sections can sometimes be avoided by resorting to particular interventions, some of which come from traditional Chinese medicine (moxibustion, acupuncture and external cephalic version), although these are only available in some facilities. The duty obstetricians and gynaecologists will be able to explain how these work and tell you what the advantages are.

What happens immediately after childbirth in hospital?

In some hospitals, you will be able to keep your baby with you 24 hours a day (*rooming in*), which helps mother-baby bonding and breastfeeding. The paediatrician will examine the baby regularly, even when he or she remains with you. Assuming there are no complications, you will generally be allowed home between 48 and 72 hours after the birth.

In many health advisory centres, those registered with the National Health Service (SSN) will be eligible for at least one free visit from the obstetrician: all these centres provide an opportunity to request a first visit from the paediatrician, which should take place within one month of the birth.

What should I do if I have any concerns once I've left hospital after the birth and gone home?

Qualified staff will be on hand at the Punto Nascita and the health advisory centre to give you clear answers and advice. You should

go back to the health advisory centre approximately one month after the birth, making an appointment as soon as you leave hospital.

If there are other women who have already had children near you, you can ask them for advice: find out whether there is a help group for breastfeeding mothers in your area.

What rights do I have as a foreign mother?

If you are a non-Community expectant mother and have no residence permit, you can be issued with a residence permit for yourself and your husband, which will be valid throughout your pregnancy and for the first six months after the birth. You should go to the Questura (Police Headquarters), taking with you the certificate of pregnancy stating the month of gestation and your due date of delivery. This permit will enable you to register for health care, but you will not be entitled to renew it once six months have elapsed after the birth.

All foreign women, even if they are only in possession of the Temporarily Resident Foreigners' Card (STP Card), are entitled to free clinical and laboratory tests, specialist consultations, antenatal classes, in-patient childbirth stays and treatment for any illnesses ensuing from the birth at health advisory centres, public hospitals and accredited facilities. If you are a Community or non-Community citizen holding a residence permit and are suffering financial hardship, you can check whether you are entitled to financial aid with the municipal social services or the Local Health Authority (AUSL). If you are a Community or non-Community citizen holding a long-term EU Residence Permit (Permesso di Soggiorno CE), you should apply to the social services to check whether or not you are entitled to maternity benefit.

POST PARTUM AND PAEDIATRIC HELP



Is breastfeeding best?

Breast milk is the best food for the baby; it is good for the baby's health, growth and development. Breastfeeding helps mother-newborn bonding. Breastfeeding is also good for the mother's health.

Will breast milk be enough for the baby?

Breastfeeding alone is the best food for your baby during its first six months, as decreed both by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and by UNICEF, after this supplementary food can be given, but it is wise to carry on breastfeeding

for as long as possible. The WHO recommends breastfeeding until the child is two years old.

When should I put the baby to the breast?

Ideally, you should allow your baby to latch on as often as he/she wants, because this also means that the mother can be sure that the baby is getting as much milk as he/she needs. It is worth remembering that breastfeeding stimulates milk production.

What treatment is the child entitled to?

Your child has the right to be treated by a paediatrician, whether you are registered with the National Health Service (SSN) or whether you have an Temporarily Resident Foreigner's Card (STP Card). Up until his/her sixth birthday, your child has a right to specialist consultations, laboratory tests and other free tests if your gross family income falls below a certain legally-established figure. You can find out more about this from

the Local Health Authority (AUSL) ticket office. If you are experiencing serious financial hardship, you can contact the social worker.

Why should I choose the paediatrician?

Paediatricians follow the child's progress free of charge from immediately after the birth, as he/she grows up, and carry out periodic check ups. All children between the ages of 0 and 14 are entitled to paediatric care.

How do I choose a paediatrician?

If you have a valid residence permit, one of the parents can go to their own AUSL with proof of identity and self-certify the child's details. When the choice of paediatrician is made, the child will be automatically registered with the SSN and will be assigned a personal health code indicating the name of that particular paediatrician. Given the importance of the relationship with the paediatrician being based on trust, the parents will be able to choose one of the doctors on

the AUSL lists. If you do not have a valid residence permit, you will not be able to formalise the choice of paediatrician, but your child will still be entitled to outpatient treatment and he/she will therefore be able to see any paediatrician free of charge by appointment.

When can I contact the paediatrician?

Paediatricians see children in their consulting rooms five days a week. Should a sick child registered with the SSN be unable to leave home, those who have made their choice of paediatrician can request home visits. It is up to the paediatricians themselves to evaluate whether or not such a visit will be necessary. Paediatric home visits, which can also be made on Saturdays, should be requested before 10.00 am since they are made throughout the day; where requests for home visits are received after 10.00am, these should take place before noon the following day. Urgent requests will, in any case, be dealt with as quickly as possible.

What part does the paediatrician play in my child's health?

Paediatricians look after your child's overall health, and therefore they are not merely responsible for diagnosing and treating illness, but also for its prevention, which is extremely important. To this end, complex check ups known as 'health assessments' will be scheduled from time to time and will include specific screenings as well as normal consultations. There are 9 health assessments, to be carried out at specific intervals, about which the paediatrician will advise the parents of children in his charge.

Which vaccinations should my child have?

Vaccinations are strongly recommended in order to safeguard the child's health and that of the community. In Italy there is a timetable of vaccinations for children, and all those registered with the SSN will be invited to attend for the requisite vaccinations. Vaccinations are also free for irregular immigrants. Your health advisory centre can provide you with further details.

CONTRACEPTION



How can I avoid unwanted pregnancies?

Correct use of contraceptives allows you to avoid unwanted pregnancies and therefore to decide when to have a child. There are several methods of contraception that are only effective during the period in which they have been taken correctly and which do not have adverse effects on future fertility.

What kinds of contraceptives are available in Italy?

- Condoms
- Hormonal contraceptives
- The coil (IUD)
- Natural methods

What are condoms and how do they work?

They are barrier methods of contraception and are a sort of sheath of natural rubber that is slipped onto the male organ before sex takes place so as to prevent any ejacu-

lated sperm from penetrating the vagina. Condoms are particularly indicated for those who have occasional sexual relations or who are not in stable relationships. Condoms are the only contraceptive method that really does protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, hepatitis, syphilis and gonorrhoea. Condoms are 90% effective against pregnancy. You should make sure you use condoms that have been quality controlled, check their sell-by date and look after them carefully, ensuring that they are not subjected to high temperatures.

What is hormonal contraception?

This method of contraception consists of small doses of hormones, taken on a regular basis which, when taken correctly, are 99.9% effective against pregnancy.

This group includes:

- the pill, which must be taken orally every day. The health advisory centre will advise you on how to take it. Each type of pill has its own user instruc-

tions. There is one type of pill that even be taken while breastfeeding, and has no adverse effects on either milk production or on the baby's health. Most of these pills have to be paid for, although some are free and can be prescribed by the health advisory centre;

- the patch, which is applied to the skin and changed once a week;
- the vaginal ring, which is inserted into the vagina and changed once a month.

These are all available on prescription from the chemist. Either the health advisory centre or your family doctor can provide this free of charge.

What is the coil (IUD) and how does it work?

The coil (IUD) is a plastic device inserted into the vagina by a gynaecologist. It is very small and cannot be felt by the woman, even during sexual intercourse. It works by irritating the uterine mucous, thereby preventing the fertilised

egg (embryo) from becoming embedded in the womb. It is not recommended for young women who have not yet had a pregnancy and does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Coils last from 3 to 5 years and are almost 98% effective against pregnancy. They must be inserted, removed and periodically checked by staff at the health advisory centre.

What are natural methods of contraception?

These are based on absence from penetrative sexual intercourse during the fertile period of your menstrual cycle, i.e. around the time of ovulation. The fertile period can be calculated using a different method, although this is not always reliable, partly because women's cycles can vary. This is why natural methods are not regarded as efficient methods of contraception.

Is coitus interruptus a method of contraception?

Coitus interruptus, which consists

of pulling the penis out of the vagina before ejaculation, is an unreliable method of contraception, because sperm may be present in the lubricating fluid produced by men when they become aroused, which may well be capable of fertilising.

What should I do if I have had unprotected sexual intercourse and might be pregnant?

Go to the health advisory centre (or Emergency department or general practitioner) as soon as possible, where you will be seen and possibly prescribed emergency contraception. There are two methods: a) the morning-after pill (which contains hormones) which must be taken within 72 of hours of unprotected sexual intercourse, this has a 3% failure rate and can be prescribed to underage girls without parental consent: b) the coil, which must be fitted within 5 days of unprotected sexual intercourse.

ELECTIVE TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY (IVG)



What should I do if I find I am expecting a baby and have doubts about continuing with the pregnancy?

You can go to the health advisory centre where staff will be on hand to listen to and support you in your decision. Where your decision is motivated by financial, family or social concerns, they will be able to

help you find out whether any help might be forthcoming from the social services, who may be able to provide financial aid, to help you keep and bring up the baby.

If I cannot keep the baby, are abortions allowed in Italy?

Under Italian law (L. 194/1978), pregnancy may be terminated with-

in the first 12 weeks and five days with complete anonymity and without your partner's consent. Abortions are only carried out in health or approved facilities. Health advisory centres guarantee to help even women who are not regular citizens. Termination can only be carried out on health grounds after the 90th day of pregnancy, i.e. when the pregnancy would pose a serious risk to the woman's psycho-physical health. Illegal and clandestine abortions, even by means of drugs or other substances, can prove ineffective or dangerous to the woman's health.

Can I have an elective termination of pregnancy (IVG) even if I am underage?

If both your parent are aware of the situation, their permission is sufficient.

If your parents are not around or if you do not wish them to be informed, you should go to the health advisory centre, where the social worker will help you apply for judicial permission.

How do I apply for an IVG?

After taking a laboratory pregnancy test, you can go to the health advisory centre where you will be examined to ascertain how many weeks on you are. Once the reasons behind your decision, possible alternatives and future contraceptive possibilities have been discussed, you will be issued with a termination certificate for use along with valid proof of identification. This will enable you to book the intervention at a hospital facility seven days after issue of the certificate. The intervention will be carried out in total anonymity. Approximately one month after the intervention, you must go back to the health advisory centre for a check up.

After certification but prior to the intervention, you are free to change your mind at any time and to go back to the health advisory centre and discuss this with the staff.

What risks do IVGs pose for future pregnancies?

IVGs do not preclude the likelihood

of being able to have children in the future, but should not be regarded as a method of contraception because repeated terminations can affect women's health.

What can I do if I can't keep the baby, but don't want to have an abortion?

Under Italian law (L. 127/1997) you are allowed not to recognise

your own child with no risk of the authorities being informed, and you will be able to give birth in hospital without revealing your name. The baby will then be given up for adoption to a family who will take charge of him/her very soon. However, you do have 10 days in which you can recognise the child should you change your mind and decide to keep the baby.



CANCER PREVENTION



The Tuscan Region provides 3 free screening programmes: for cervical cancer (by means of a pap-test), for breast cancer (by means of a mammogram) and for colorectal cancer (by testing for blood in the faeces, provided for both men and women between the ages of 50 and 70).

If you are a resident, the appointment will be sent to you at home, but you will be able to change the appointment date if necessary by

telephoning the number provided in the letter. Should you not receive an appointment, you should consult the health advisory centre or telephone freephone 800556060 yourself.

What is a screening?

Oncological screening is carried out in order to identify changes which might, if not picked up and treated, eventually lead to cancer.

Which women are invited to have these tests?

Pap-test. Italian and foreign women between the ages of 25 and 64 who are regular citizens in Italy are invited for pap-tests. If the first test is negative, you will be invited back every 3 years if you are aged between 25 and 64.

Mammogram. Italian and foreign women between the ages of 50 and 70 who are regular citizens in Italy will be invited for a mammogram every two years.

What does the test consist of?

Pap-test. This is a simple, painless test. It is carried out by an operator who will use a spatula and a tiny brush to remove some cells from the neck of the womb. These are “smear” onto a glass slide and then sent to the laboratory for testing.

Mammogram. This is an X-ray of the breast, taken using tiny doses of radiation that pose absolutely no health hazards. It is a very quick test, taking half an hour at the most.

What does it mean if I get called back?

Pap-test. Should the test reveal any changes, the Local Health Authority (AUSL) will call you back for further investigations by means of another test (colposcopy).

Mammogram. You may be recalled because the appearance of the radiographs suggests that further tests are necessary. Sometimes all that is needed is another mammogram, but sometimes a scan or a sample of tissue will be necessary (biopsy or fine needle aspiration). You should not jump to conclusions if you are called back, because this does not necessarily mean that a tumour has been found: in fact changes that were initially thought to be suspect can be ruled out through subsequent tests. It is therefore important to follow through on the diagnostic process in order to assess one's own state of health.

Can this test prevent cancer?

Pap-test. Regular pap-tests are the best means of identifying early changes in the cervix of the uterus. Early discovery and treatment will prevent most tumours from developing, although not in every single case.

Awareness of the factors which carry a higher risk of cancers developing such as for example, having several partners, living in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions etc., is crucial.

Mammogram. One of the best ways of picking up breast changes at an early stage is by having regular mammograms. Additionally, self-breast examination is also important, watching out for thickening, nodules, skin changes or fluid exuded by the nipple, or pain. Should you discover any of the above, you should tell your doctor or the health advisory centre without delay. Where there is a family history of breast cancer, mammograms should be carried out at an earlier age.

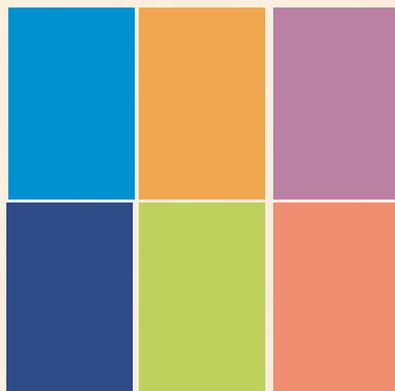
What is the menopause and what should I do when it happens?

The menopause is not an illness, but a completely normal physiological stage that all women go through, and which signals the end of their childbearing years. The most obvious sign is in fact the cessation of menstruation. Menopause usually occurs at around the age of 50, the average age being roughly 45 to 53 as a general rule. When you enter this phase, the skeleton begins to weaken, carrying a risk of fractures (osteoporosis), and you run a greater risk of developing vascular disease and breast cancer. It is important to look after your own health and to make full use of your health advisory centre.

The Health Service in Italy: Some Further Information	
SSN NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE	The National Health Service [Servizio Sanitario Nazionale] is the body of agencies responsible for looking after people's health, where help and treatment can be found.
AUSL LOCAL HEALTH AUTHORITY	The Local Health Authority [Azienda Sanitaria Locale] organises and manages the health provision in the various different regional areas, with regard to prevention, diagnosis and treatment services.
STP CARD TEMPO- RARILY RESIDENT FOREIGNER	If you are a foreign woman and do not have a regular Residence Permit (Permesso di Soggiorno), you are still entitled to health assistance through the acquisition of a Temporarily Resident Foreigner's Card (STP Card). You can apply for your STP Card at the AUSL nearest to you or at a family health advisory centre. The STP Card is valid for 6 months, and can be renewed at the original issuing office. It is valid throughout Italy. You run no risks by going to a public health agency: you will not be reported to the Police Authorities.
PUNTI NASCITA	The Punti Nascita are the hospital facilities that will look after you as soon as you go into labour. There are 34 Punti Nascita in Tuscany.

How to sign up to the SSN	
Are you a non-EU foreign woman with a regular Residence Permit or Card?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take the following documents along to the health authority: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-certification of your anagraphical and residence data Residence Permit or Residence Card issued by the Questura, or if these are not available, a receipt for your Residence Permit/ Card renewal application. Tax Code [Codice Fiscale] AUSL Health Card if issued by a different Health Authority.
Are you an EU foreign woman?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take the following documents along to the health authority: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-certification of your anagraphical data Residence Certificate or self-certification proving that you are resident or domiciled within the AUSL area. Employment Contract (if employed) or Chamber of Commerce [Camera di Commercio] registration (if self-employed) or Job Centre registration if unemployed (i.e. you have lost a previous job) or you are in possession of one of the following forms issued by your country of origin: E106, E109, E121, E120 Marital status if you are an EU citizen and dependent of an Italian citizen, or of an EU worker, whether employed or self-employed. Tax Code [Codice Fiscale]
Are you an irregular foreigner with regard to entry and residence legislation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you are still entitled to SSN care. Within this framework, maternity care and child care are guaranteed in particular. In order to access these services you should apply for an STP Card [Tesserino STP].

Local Health and Hospital Centres	Telephone Num- bers Pronto Salu- te/ Health First
AUSL 1 Massa and Carrara	800 565509
AUSL 2 Lucca	800 869143
AUSL 3 Pistoia	800 861213
AUSL 4 Prato	800 017835
AUSL 5 Pisa	800 221290
AUSL 6 Livorno (Leghorn)	800 016009
AUSL 7 Siena	0577 586047
AUSL 8 Arezzo	0575 254000
AUSL 9 Grosseto	800 320651
AUSL 10 Firenze (Florence)	840 003003
AUSL 11 Empoli	0571 7051
AUSL 12 Viareggio	800 297211
Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Pisana (Pisa Hospital)	800 015877
Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Senese (Siena Hospital)	0577 585137
Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Careggi (Careggi Hospital)	840 003003
Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Meyer (Meyer Children's Hospital)	055 5662332



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