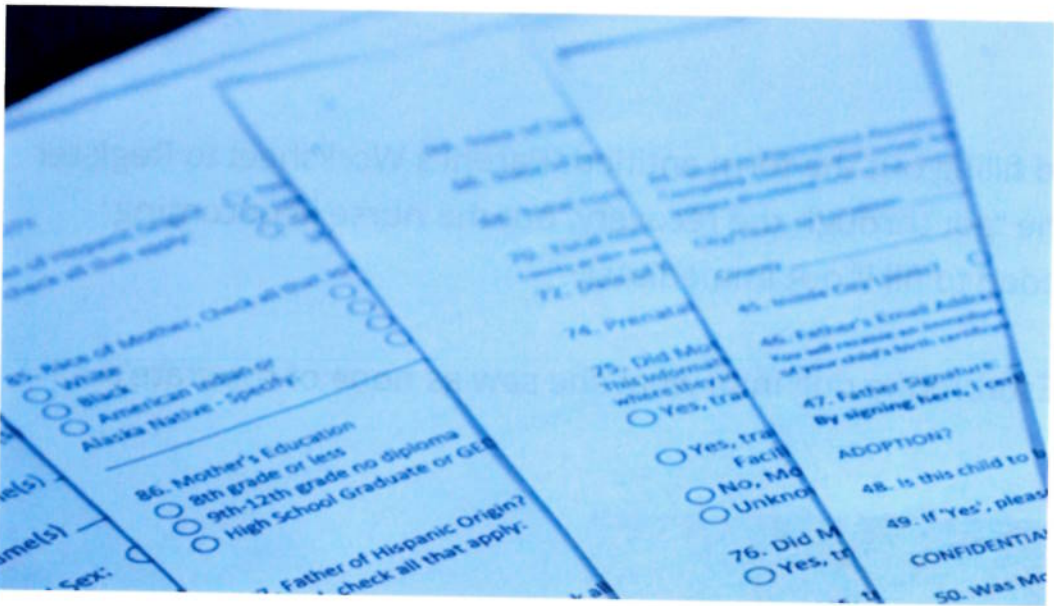




Utah birth certificates withheld in exchange for personal information

by Heidi Hatch, KUTV
Monday, November 15th 2021



The first minutes and hours after a baby is born can be some of the most important when it comes to bonding, yet the state of Utah requires new moms to answer more than 100 questions — often within eight hours of giving birth.

(KUTV) — The first minutes and hours after a baby is born can be some of the most important when it comes to bonding, yet the state of Utah requires new moms to answer more than 100 questions — often within eight hours of giving birth.

“In those moments you are exhausted, and you are focused on this new life,” mom Ivy Estabrooke said.

Estabrooke has three daughters and knows what to expect when it comes to childbirth — or so she thought.

In February of this year, she gave birth to her third daughter. Everything went as planned until she left surgical recovery after a planned C-section at the University of Utah Hospital.

Back in labor and delivery, she was handed a stack of paperwork marked “required.” The forms had a deadline of eight hours. The forms were stamped with official codes from the Utah Department of Health, and in no uncertain terms stated the forms would need to be complete in order to receive a birth certificate.

Estabrooke, who, like most moms, was exhausted and adjusting to the new life she held in her arms, wanted to focus on healing and bonding. The last thing she wanted to do was paperwork.

She said she tried to avoid filling out the form entitled “Parent’s Worksheet to Register Birth Information” until she “got through the recovery, but the nurse kept coming back in and insisting I needed to fill it out immediately.”

As the deadline loomed, Estabrooke dug in to what she saw as none of the state’s business.



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“It asks a lot of personal medical information about the mother, including, ‘did you use infertility treatments; did you use a sperm donor? If you didn’t take prenatal vitamins — why didn’t you?’” she said.

The list of questions goes on.

Have you been tested for zika? Did you have your teeth cleaned while pregnant? What about your weight at delivery?

Some questions that gave her more pause than others included “a lot of questions about previous births and pregnancies.” She said that “can be traumatizing if you have had miscarriages or lost children.”

Bottom line, Estabrooke said it felt “invasive,” but more importantly, “none of the state’s business.”

Estabrooke said she wasn't happy about the barrage of questions at the time, but felt she had no choice. She put her baby down, filled out the forms and handed them over in the time required.

“The fine print is really clear: if you don't fill it out completely and accurately, you will not get a birth certificate,” she said.

Not getting a birth certificate is not an option for anyone who'd like their child to have a social security number, go to school, eventually get a driver license or a passport. For that reason, the forms are always filled out, even, like Estabrooke, begrudgingly.

SHOW FORMS

Flash forward eight months, and the fog of new motherhood is gone. Baby Catherine is close to crawling, and Estabrooke is long since back to work.

What hasn't changed for her is the aggravation over the state's handling of Catherine's birth certificate.

Estabrooke, who moved to Utah in 2014 to lead the state's USTAR team, went first to the governor's office where she'd been hired. She wanted to know where all her personal information went and how it was used.

That was in May, and with no answers, she went to the Attorney General's office in July and again in September, both times with no response.

Estabrooke said she called the University of Utah as well, which put her in touch with the Utah Department of Health. Once in contact with UDOH, she said she "either got no response or a lot of push back and pat on the head of, 'don't worry, we will take good care of your information.'"

That's when KUTV started making calls, in search of answers not just for Estabrooke, but for every new mom in the state.

The health department's communication's director, Tom Hudachko, confirmed they did have a new mom reach out "with some concerns."

KUTV 2News set up a meeting, and that's when we were able to start getting Estabrooke answers.

Hudachko admitted there were issues with the paperwork, saying, "as we worked through her concerns, we came to the realization that the wording on it was likely a little too strong, and most of the information, or some, is not actually required."

The form given to every new mom in Utah clearly states "required," but state officials admit it is not.

Hudachko said most of the information collected is for research used to help inform public health interventions.

Estabrooke said she understands why the state would want the treasure trove of information. She has a PhD in neuroscience, and as a researcher, understands the value of a near constant flow of data.

That information, while valuable, is not collected with clear consent.

"A violation of scientific ethics," Estabrooke said, something the scientist understands to be very important.

The state apparently agrees, telling KUTV they are ready to gut the form.

Hudachko said the state will go over the longer form certificate in the next month and clearly identify what is and isn't required.

New forms will be sent to hospitals and birthing centers clearly marked with what is required by law to receive a birth certificate and what information will be used for research.

Submitting your U.S. birth certificate

The form is titled "Name of Your State - Vital Records Certificate of Live Birth". It contains the following fields and information:

- 1** Must be issued by the city, county, or state where the passport applicant was born (points to the top header area).
- 7** Must list full name, date of birth, and place of birth of the passport applicant (points to the "Date of Birth" and "Place of Birth" fields).
- 2** Must be filed with the state's registrar within 1 year of birth (points to the "Date Filed" field).
- 3** Must include seal or stamp from the office issuing the document (points to the "Seal of the State of Utah" on the right).
- 5** May include a watermark. Security features vary. (points to the central circular watermark area).
- 6** Must list parents' full names (points to the "Father's Name" and "Mother's Maiden Name" fields).
- 4** Must have the signature of the city, county, or state registrar (points to the "Registrar" signature line at the bottom).

Fields on the form include: Date of Birth, File Number, Date Filed, Date Issued, Place of Birth, Name, Sex, Father's Name, Birthplace, Mother's Maiden Name, Birthplace, and signatures for the Secretary and Registrar.

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U.S. birth certificate requirements:

- Issued by the city, county, or state of birth
- Lists applicant's full name, date of birth, and place of birth
- Lists parent(s)' full names
- Has the signature of the city, county, or state registrar
- Has the date filed with registrar's office (must be within one year of birth)
- Has the seal of issuing authority

The state, Hudachko said, will start asking permission for the information as soon as December, making much of it optional and allowing more time for parents to answer.

"The last thing we want to do is introduce stress into that type of situation," Hudachko said.

As for the time requirements, those will change as well. Currently, UDOH sends out the forms to hospitals with a blank box where the hospital, up until now, could put a time limit on when the form needs to be finished.

The University of Utah, where Estabrooke gave birth, had an eight-hour requirement when she was given the forms. The time limit was in bold on the first page.

University hospital officials told KUTV that the eight hours is not a policy or requirement.

Instead, they said the "guideline our teams follow is to have the mom fill out the form before the patient is discharged. The form that said 'eight hours' is apparently a holdover from years past, but it's not specifically enforced."

Enforced or not, new moms see the "eight-hour" deadline as just that — a deadline and requirement. New mothers see it to be both a law and enforceable. Neither appears to be true.

So, what is the state doing with all the information it's already collected? Tuesday on 2News at 10 p.m., we look at years' worth of data collected by the state. Is it sold, and if so, to who? And can parents have their information stripped from the system?