



UNDERSTANDING INTRAPARTUM SURVEILLANCE

Monitoring a baby during labour

It is imperative for healthcare providers to ensure that both mother and baby are safe once the mother goes into labour. This key concern can be addressed well through intrapartum surveillance. This is a way to keep an eye on how the baby is doing during labour and helps doctors and midwives make informed decisions in real time.

What exactly is Intrapartum Surveillance?

While the importance of intrapartum surveillance is clear, the process is still not well understood. In simple terms, it's a set of methods used to watch over the baby's heart rate and, sometimes, the strength and frequency of the mother's contractions. If the baby is for some reason not coping well with labour, this method catches the early signs and can facilitate timely intervention.

Useful tools in Intrapartum Surveillance

In intrapartum surveillance, the most common tool used is Electronic Foetal Monitoring (EFM). In this, two belts are placed around the mother's belly - one tracks the baby's heartbeat, and the other measures contractions. There are two types: external monitoring (with sensors on the belly) and internal monitoring (with a tiny electrode placed on the baby's scalp if the water has already broken and the cervix is dilated enough).

This surveillance is crucial as during labour, contractions temporarily reduce blood flow to the baby. While most babies are not affected by this, some may show signs of distress with a changing heart rate pattern indicating that the baby needs help. This help could involve more oxygen, a change in the mother's position, or, in some cases, a quicker delivery like a caesarean section.



Another very effective tool is intermittent auscultation, wherein a provider uses a handheld device (like a Doppler) to check the baby's heart rate at regular intervals instead of continuously. Often used in low-risk pregnancies, this method makes more freedom of movement possible during labour.

The pros and cons

It is important to keep in mind that while intrapartum surveillance is no doubt helpful, it's not perfect. It can often result in false alarms, leading to interventions that might not have been necessary. That's why other factors such as how the labour is progressing, how the mother feels and other signs are equally relevant and need to be taken into account.

Intrapartum surveillance in brief provides healthcare teams with the information they need to support a safe birth. Used correctly, it helps ensure that both mother and baby come through the experience healthy and well.