

Longmont United Hospital debuts online birthing class

By Pam Mellskog | Longmont Times-Call

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LONGMONT – Expectant mothers with work schedule conflicts, doctor's orders for bed rest or simply too many miles between home and hospital once ditched a class that could be their all-time favorite – the class devoted to their baby's birthday.



Heather and Matt Monson of Longmont take a birthing class from Darcie Ell, the Family Life Educator at The Birthplace at Longmont United Hospital, on Thursday. (Richard M. Hackett/Times-Call)

She promises to respond within 48 hours.

Longmont-based InJoy Birth & Parenting Education debuted the online course in April and has since sold it to about 35 hospitals besides LUH, said Julie Perry, InJoy's product development manager and producer.

"Technology is changing, and a lot of parents feel very comfortable going online for this information," she explained.

InJoy adapted the material in the online class from its award-winning, best-selling "Understanding Birth" DVD program.

The company held multiple focus groups with birthing class educators such as Ell to make sure the online product would be a hit, too.

"We learned that we needed to make every page look as pleasing as possible, as visually interesting as possible so that (expectant parents) wouldn't get bored," Perry said. "The focus groups also helped us learn when something needed to be toned down. You don't want to go too far and make it too cheesy. It's still an educational product."

The online course rolls out in eight chapters that cover the basics – labor, comfort techniques, medical procedures, birth stories, etc. – with doodads such as three-dimensional animation, video clips, slide shows, breakout boxes and interactive learning tools.

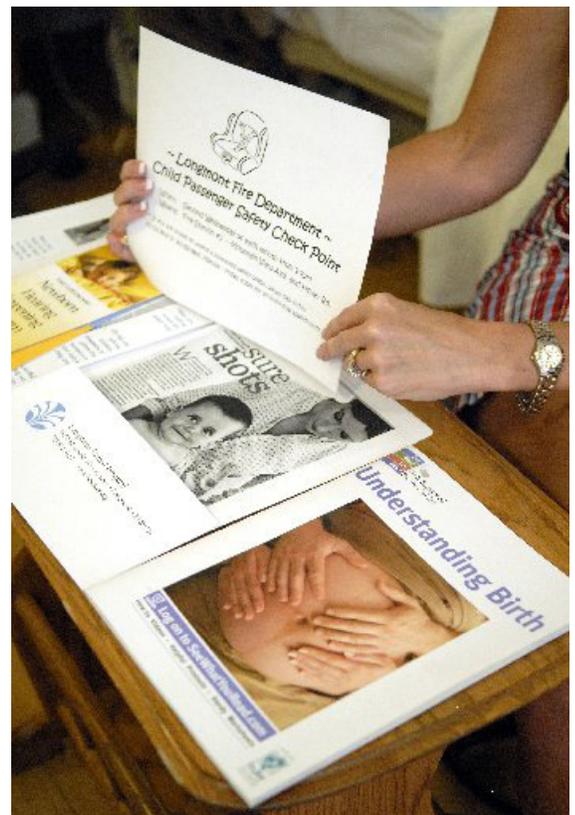
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"We really don't want anyone out in the community to miss the class because of these reasons," said Darcie Ell, family life educator at The BirthPlace at Longmont United Hospital.

So, LUH this month added an online childbirth class to the group and private classes Ell offers to parents hoping to be better prepared in the delivery room.

The class, called Understanding Birth eClass, comes with three options and prices – the online class, \$65; the online class with a tour of The BirthPlace, \$75; and the online class with a tour of The BirthPlace and a one-on-one labor rehearsal, \$95.

Ell emphasized that the online class also invites participants to "ask an educator" – to email questions that come up during the self-paced study.



Darcie Ell, the Family Life Educator at The Birthplace at Longmont United Hospital, leads a birthing class at LUH on Thursday. (Richard M. Hackett/Times-Call)

For instance, in the first chapter readers can drag their mouse over a list of body parts, such as the lungs, affected by pregnancy and that part will light up on the woman's figure during the description.

Every chapter ends with an ungraded quiz to test the reader's knowledge of material presented and a so-called extended activity, such as how to discuss concerns such as finances, parenthood and how the baby will change the relationship you have with your partner, Perry said.

The downsides of the eClass relate to language – InJoy hopes to release the online English product in Spanish, but has not set a release date – and cost coverage for those unable to afford tuition.

Medicaid will cover the \$80 fee for low-income mothers enrolled in the traditional class, but not the eClass, Ell said.

Of course, parents who get childbirth online miss class camaraderie.

"I would love to have everyone get the information in the class setting because you get so much from your peers, from the interpersonal relationships that you establish in a classroom setting," Ell said. "But if you can't get there, this is the next best thing."

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