



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Office of the Chief Clinical Officer  
Dr Steevens' Hospital | Steevens' Lane | D08 W2A8  
email: [cco@hse.ie](mailto:cco@hse.ie)

**Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Cliniciúile**  
Ospidéal Dr. Steevens | Baile Átha Cliath 8 | D08 W2A8

**Deputy Seán Canney**

Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020

**RE PQ 39860/20** - To ask the Minister for Health the reason the HSE is advising that women who are 28 weeks pregnant continue to work as teachers in situations in which they cannot socially distance when the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine advise against doing so, if the HSE has updated their guidelines to taken into account recent research on the subject; if his attention has been drawn to the quandary that this is placing teachers in at the end of their pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Canney,

Thank you for your representation. The current advice from the Institute of Obstetricians and gynaecology (ICOG) in Ireland states:

“Employers should be sensitive to the fact that pregnant women are, appropriately, often anxious about their own health and protective of their unborn baby.”

This advice comes from the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) and is consistent with the position of ICOG based not only on international evidence but also the experience in Ireland. Since the 1st March approximately 45,000 babies have been delivered in Ireland and there have been no maternal death from COVID. In the Netherlands there has been one maternal death reported in approximately 80,000 births. This should be contrasted with the experience of the United Kingdom where it has been reported that there is an incidence rate of 5.8 mortalities per 100,000 births. It can be seen that the rate in the United Kingdom appears to be higher than Ireland or the Netherlands. The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (RCOG) is an internationally regarded organisation but it should be borne in mind that their advice is based on UK data. This data highlights that pregnancy related COVID deaths are very much associated with minority ethnic groups and pre-existing morbidity.

To date the data from Ireland, with no maternal deaths, is a reflection on our population, our underlying incidence of COVID, the response of the health service and the priority accorded to keeping maternity units free of COVID.

Whilst working during pregnancy is not without risks there is no recommendation to cease work at a particular time during gestation. In practice many workers are stopping slightly earlier depending on their obstetricians individual risk assessment. Risk factors like ethnicity, obesity, older age diabetes and hypertension all need to be assessed as well as the environment. Obstetricians are counselling patients regarding ventilation, avoiding mingling at mealtimes in staff rooms etc.

The Irish advice is prepared by professionals who are both aware of international data and well positioned to interpret it. As further data, both national and international, becomes available the flexibility exists to rapidly alter the advice.

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,



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Health Service Executive

Sharon Hayden  
General Manager, Office of the CCO

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