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Deputy Smith
Dáil Éireann,
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1st December 2020

PQ Ref 36273/20 To ask the Minister for Health the reason the HSE has authorised a temporary cessation of water birth effectively limiting the options and choices of mothers further given the current Covid-19 restrictions with regard to partners attending maternity visits; the reason an association (details supplied) as providers of the service were not included in discussions prior to the decision to cease the water birth service; if the service will resume as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

In response to two serious birth related adverse incidents occurring in the HSE's National Homebirth Service in recent times, the Chief Clinical Officer of the HSE requested the HSE's National Women and Infants Health Programme to convene a Review Group. The objective of this Review was to provide to the CCO any interim guidance the Group deemed appropriate regarding the provision of water births in the HSE homebirth service pending further detailed investigation of the two incidents.

The Membership of the Group convened included specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology and neonatology, midwifery expertise comprising directors of midwifery, advanced midwifery practitioners and a designated midwifery officer from the HSE home birth service.

The Review Group completed its work with a wide range of areas and issues being considered and covered as part of its deliberations including current evidence, guidance and practices into water births.

The Group agreed the following suite of recommendations pending the outcome of the detailed investigation of the two recent adverse incidents in the HSE National Home Birth Service:

1. The continued provision of homebirths under the HSE's National Homebirth Service;

2. The continued facilitation of women labouring in water in the HSE's National Homebirth Service; and
3. A pause in the facilitation of the delivery of babies under water in the HSE's National Homebirth Service until the outcome of the investigations of the recent incidents are known.

Based on the above recommendations, access to the HSE's National Homebirth Service remains in place for women and their partners with a pause currently in place in relation to a component of the home birth service which to date is accessed by on average 40 women per year.

These recommendations were agreed to and accepted by the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer and have been implemented in the HSE. Upon the outcome of the investigations into the two incidents becoming available, the current pause in place regarding the facilitation of the delivery of babies under water will be reviewed by the HSE.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme