

CC/AK/MMcM

Email: pgmidwestacute@hse.ie

30th September 2020

Mr Alan Kelly TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

RE: PQ 24271/20

*** To ask the Minister for Health his plans to make changes to the restrictions policy in allowing birthing partners to attend the births with new mothers in addition to appointments leading up to that in University Maternity Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Alan Kelly**

Dear Deputy Kelly,

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.

In response to the Covid 19 pandemic, visiting restrictions were introduced in the UL Hospitals Group including University Maternity Hospital Limerick in early March 2020. These restrictions were introduced to reduce footfall through the Hospital and included restrictions on women being accompanied to pre-natal appointments including scanning appointments.

Visiting at University Maternity Hospital Limerick (UMHL) is currently restricted to the partners/support persons of mothers in the Labour Ward/theatre only, with a strict limit of one visitor per patient. Birthing partners are permitted to be present on the Labour Ward for all vaginal births and are permitted to remain with mother and baby for approximately one to one-and-a-half hours after delivery. Unfortunately they are requested to leave when the patient is being transferred to the postnatal ward.

Partners are also permitted during labour in the case of elective C-sections (LSCS). In the case of an emergency C-section under spinal anaesthetic, partners are permitted in theatre for the birth of the infant. If the C-section is being performed under general anaesthetic, the partner is not permitted into theatre and this has always been the practice in UMHL.

The Hospital is acutely aware and very sensitive to specific situations regarding pregnancy loss, still birth and unexpected complications and we have adapted our visiting restrictions in these situations to ensure that women have the on-site support of their partner.



The lifting of visiting restrictions during a pandemic must be done with extreme care. Maternity services nationally have had very good outcomes in relation to Maternal & Neonatal mortality during the Covid 19 period and one of the biggest factors in this was the meticulous adherence to measures that reduced footfall in our maternity units.

It is not possible at this point in time for the Hospital to put precise timelines on when the visiting restrictions will be lifted as this depends on a number of factors including the infrastructure in the Hospital and in particular the progress of the disease in our community which as seen in recent times is very unpredictable. The situation is being kept under constant review and local risk assessments have been undertaken to ensure the safe and appropriate revision of restrictions in our Hospital on a phased basis.

UMHL is committed to ensuring that the impact of Covid 19 on services and the pregnancy experience of mothers and partners is kept to an absolute minimum. We readily acknowledge the anxieties and frustrations these restrictions have caused for women and their partners, at what should be the happiest time in their lives. However, we must continue to prioritise the safety of all patients and staff, and do everything possible to ensure maternity services are protected and maintain the ability to provide a full 24/7 service despite the on-going threat of Covid-19.

I trust this clarifies the position, please contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,

pp 
Colette Cowan
Chief Executive Officer
UL Hospitals Group