

CC/MMcN/MC

Email: pgmidwestacute@hse.ie26th April 2021

Mr Michael McNamara TD,
Dàil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

*** PQ 21318/21: To ask the Minister for Health when the restrictions will be eased at Limerick Maternity Hospital given that the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin has lifted the restrictions on partners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Michael McNamara**

Dear Deputy McNamara,

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.

Visiting restrictions have been in place across UL Hospitals Group, including University Maternity Hospital Limerick (UMHL) since early March 2020, and have remained in place in line with the Government's public health guidelines for preventing transmission of COVID-19.

We have been reviewing on a weekly basis how we can relax the current visiting restrictions at UMHL in line with the recommendations of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), our HSE colleagues and our own expert staff. We are now in a position to commence the gradual easing of restrictions at University Maternity Hospital Limerick on a controlled and phased basis as local transmission of COVID-19 decreases and the vaccination programme rolls out across the Mid-West.

The option of having a nominated partner present for anomaly scans was reintroduced at the hospital last week, and from Monday, April 26th fathers/parents of babies in the neonatal unit have been permitted to visit between 4.30pm-6.30pm, subject to activity in the unit.

Weekly risk assessment is ongoing at the hospital with a view to giving a nominated partner 45-minute visiting slots on the hospital's postnatal wards, M1 and M2, from May 10th 2021 between the hours of 6pm and 8pm daily.

All nominated partners must adhere to the wearing of face masks, observe hand hygiene and social distancing. Temperature monitoring is in place at the main reception, along with the completion of a COVID-19 screening questionnaire.

These are welcome first steps in the careful, phased relaxation of the visiting restrictions that have been in force at UMHL for almost the entirety of the pandemic. While these restrictions have been difficult, they have been necessary, and effective. During the surge of cases in the earlier part of the year, it was more important than ever to safeguard the health of mothers and babies and our staff. We are grateful for the cooperation of our patients and their families and the broader community. Thanks to these sacrifices, there has been no outbreak of COVID-19 in UMHL to date.

In taking the decision to implement or relax restrictions, UMHL, like all maternity hospitals, has regard to three primary factors: the rate of COVID transmission within the local community, the number of staff in the hospital and the possibility of those staff becoming unwell, and the infrastructure of the hospital site.

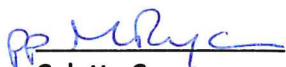
UMHL is acting in accordance with the advice of the National Women and Infant's Health Programme, whose clinical director Dr Peter McKenna earlier this week expressed hope that the decrease in community transmission, allied with immunisation of hospital staff, would enable the country's maternity hospitals to relax access restrictions over the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, visiting on the basis of compassion grounds will continue to be facilitated, as it has been throughout the pandemic. Birthing partners will also continue to be supported in attending the Labour Ward and Theatre.

The measures are subject to change, and hospital management will continue to review the situation on a weekly basis, to plan for the safe, controlled and phased relaxation of restrictions, and to ensure all processes are safely introduced and managed.

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

Yours sincerely,



Colette Cowan
Chief Executive Officer
UL Hospitals Group