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4th January 2022

Deputy Wynne,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 62757/21: To ask the Minister for Health if birth partner presence has resumed to pre-pandemic levels across all 19 maternity units.

Dear Deputy Wynne,

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 relation to current birth partner access across maternity units, I refer to previous responses issued to PQ 54998/21 and PQ 55000/21. As outlined, the HSE guidance on visiting, including access for nominated support partners in the maternity context, is provided by the HSE's Anti-Microbial Infection Prevention and Control (AMRIC) team. This guidance is updated regularly, in line with the changing circumstances of the pandemic, the prevailing transmission rates and the level of vaccination in the population. The most recent update was issued for implementation on the 23rd December, 2021.

The HSE AMRIC guidance for hospitals advises that where possible visiting should be planned in advance, should avoid heavy footfall in the hospital and wards at any one time, and visitors should avoid interacting with other visitors or patients they are not visiting. In addition to the generic hospital guidance, there is specific guidance for maternity services and access for nominated support partners. The current guidance can be found at:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/acutehospitalsguidance/Guidance%20on%20Access%20to%20Acute%20Hospitals%20for%20Nominated%20Support%20Partners.pdf>

The level of current birth partner presence as it compares to pre-pandemic levels is not directly quantifiable and is in itself most likely affected by many factors. However as outlined, the HSE continues to balance the needs of women and their nominated support partner with the risk of infection and transmission in the hospital setting. In this vein, the AMRIC guidance states that restrictions to nominated support partner access should be at the minimum level required to manage infection prevention and risk. While it is not possible to draw comparison to pre-pandemic presence directly, it can be surmised that hospitals are guided to facilitate access where safe and possible to do so.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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