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March 30th 2021

Deputy Stanley,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 16359/21: To ask the Minister for Health if the policy of not allowing partners of pregnant women attend scans will be reviewed given that staff are vaccinated

Dear Deputy Stanley,

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.

The purpose of restrictions in maternity units is to provide a safe environment for mothers, babies and staff. The rollout of the vaccination programme is a welcome development.

As you may be aware, in early December the HSE reclassified partners as “essential accompanying person” for the purpose of the anatomy scan, which is usually done at 20 weeks. At that point in time, all maternity services were endeavouring to facilitate this bearing in mind this may be difficult due to underlying infection rates in both the community and hospital staff. Additionally there may be infrastructural issues with some scanning facilities that will make compliance with infection control difficult. Where hospitals were unable to facilitate partners they have been asked to document their reasons and review the circumstances weekly.

However, on foot of the third wave of the pandemic that the country is currently experiencing exceptional high rates of community transmission being recorded and its impact on the provision of health service, all maternity services have had to again review the level of access to their sites for partners in light of both patient and staff safety.

It should also be noted however that there is some concern that even when vaccinated people may still have the ability to carry the virus and infect others. This issue is being considered by NPHE and further advice on this is awaited. Given the above, and the fact that the country is facing more restrictive measure than ever it is likely that maternity units will continue to adopt a conservative approach in terms of managing risk regarding women, babies and staff. Until the community transmission rates are much lower than currently, significant changes are not anticipated.

All involved in the provision of maternity services are aware of the difficulty and distress that the current restrictions on accompanying persons due to COVID 19 have caused. All service providers look forward to the restoration of normal visiting and the accommodation of partners when it is safe to do so.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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