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31st May 2022

Deputy Cairns
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 23880/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of water birthing facilities available in HSE maternity hospitals and units; the number of water births which occurred in these facilities between 1 January 2015 and 30 November 2020, inclusive, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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

Whilst this pause on water births in the community is in place, the HSE's National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) continues to support the provision of water births in hospitals as part of a core component of maternity services.

In line with the National Maternity Strategy, whilst planning continues in each Hospital Group for the development of a new Alongside Birth Centre, NWIHP has invested extensively in designated spaces, Home-Away-From-Home Birthing Suites, being established within or adjacent to existing labour wards, so as to provide women with a birthing environment that supports a physiological childbirth experience.

The provision of birthing and labouring pools is a key element of these birthing suites, with NWIHP targeting that wherever feasible from an infrastructure perspective that all 19 maternity services would have in place the option of labouring and ultimately birthing in water.

As of the end of 2020 there were 9 maternity services offering women the choice to labour in water, with 2 services, Wexford and the Coombe, offering a woman the choice of a water birth.

Wexford commenced with providing water birth services in November 2020. A total of 8 women had a water birth in 2020.

From 2014-2020 the Coombe had a total of 440 pool users. 180 of these women had a water birth.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

M. Jo

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