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31st May 2022

Deputy Murphy,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 24625/22: To ask the Minister for Health if he intends to issue a directive for any remaining maternity restrictions in hospitals to be lifted completed where there are still restrictions on partners attending ante-natal and scan appointments and visiting after birth if he will explain the reason that is the case; the reason maternity services across the country are not equitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Murphy,

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.

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 21st February 2022.

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 HSE and Hospital Groups have robust processes in place to oversee compliance with the guidance, address the woman's immediate concerns and facilitate maximum access for her nominated support partner. Every effort is being made by the maternity services to facilitate maximum access to the nominated support partners to ensure a safe service continues to be provided to the woman, her baby and the staff providing the service.

Visiting arrangements for each hospital is listed on the HSE's website. Please see link below for further information.

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/hospital-service-disruptions/hospital-service-disruptions-covid19.html#local-hospital-updates>

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