



Deputy Naughten,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

23rd November 2022

PQ 55785/22: To ask the Minister for Health if he will review the HSE recommendation to limit home births to women who live within 30 minutes of a maternity hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Denis Naughten

Dear Deputy Naughten,

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.

In February 2022, the HSE Home Birth Service moved from Community Operations to Acute Operations and is now being integrated into the maternity networks, which are part of the six hospital groups, in line with the strategic objectives of the National Maternity Strategy

The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) was requested to provide advice to Acute Operations on the appropriate distance a woman should live from a maternity hospital (where she could be transferred to an obstetric unit, if the need arose during her labour at home). At the request of NWIHP, the HSE's National Health Intelligence Unit (NHIU) conducted a geospatial analysis of travel-time/distance around acute maternity units in Ireland utilising indicative ambulance "blue-light" travel speeds.

Further to this review and considering a range of issues and factors, NWIHP recommended that all women accessing the National HSE Homebirth Service would reside 30 minutes or less blue light distance from their nearest maternity service. In identifying this distance, the HSE is aware that there is a balance of risk to be considered. If a woman has an emergency in a maternity hospital, and an emergency caesarean section is called for, the woman must get to theatre within 30 minutes.

This recommendation is designed both to ensure the best possible chance of getting to a maternity hospital in a timely manner so as to ensure the best outcome for mother and baby,



and to ensure that the clinical determination of the Community Midwife is acted upon in a safe and timely manner by the wider HSE services including ambulance and maternity services.

The HSE and its National Women and Infants Health Programme recognise that homebirth is an important pathway for women. Its objective is to ensure the continuity of the service, and the safety of mothers and their babies, in line with the objectives of the National Maternity Strategy.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Smith', written over a horizontal line.

John Smith,
Assistant National Director, Acute Operations.