



Deputy Harkin,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2

24th November 2022

PQ 56798/22: To ask the Minister for Health the basis for a recent decision in regard to home births (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Marian Harkin

Dear Deputy Harkin,

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 (listed below), 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.

Issues and Factors Considered:

- The historic transfer rate into maternity unit of mothers who commenced labouring at home in the National Homebirth Service



- The primary reasons why women were transferred
- The method of transfer
- Ambulance response times
- Time needed to transfer the woman into the ambulance
- Time until assessed upon arrival at maternity unit, etc.

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 'John Smith', written over a horizontal line.

John Smith,
Assistant National Director, Acute Operations.