

**HUMAN RIGHTS CHARITY CALLS FOR EASING OF VISITING RESTRICTIONS IN
MATERNITY SERVICES**

Birthrights, the UK charity that champions respectful care for women during pregnancy and childbirth, has written to NHS England and NHS Improvement asking for visiting restrictions in maternity services to be eased.

England now lags behind Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where services have been directed to be more accommodating of partners of pregnant women.

In England, women face a postcode lottery and in many Trusts visiting restrictions remain the same as at the height of the pandemic, even when the number of local coronavirus cases is low. Enquiries to the Birthrights' advice line show growing frustration with the situation where individuals can go to the pub, the shops, the hairdresser or the casino and yet a woman's partner is not allowed to support her during pregnancy and birth.

Birthrights is concerned that Trusts are not recognising the pregnant population as a distinct group with specific needs. Whilst some restrictions may still be required to maintain social distancing, for example, in specific areas of older hospitals where rooms are small, Trusts need to consider carefully how they can accommodate partners as much as possible given their crucial supporting role and the importance of early family bonding. The damage caused by ongoing restrictions needs to be weighed up against the requirements of infection control.

Birthrights is calling for national guidance from NHS England encouraging local Trusts to relax visiting restrictions across maternity care, unless they can show that they have a compelling reason not to do so.

Maria Booker, Programmes Director, Birthrights said:

"Ongoing visiting restrictions are a significant interference with the rights of both pregnant women and their partners at a huge moment in their lives. We want to see national guidance that makes clear that the "norm" is for an individual to be supported by their chosen partner/s throughout their maternity care, and that Trusts need to have a compelling reason for deviating from that."

For media enquiries or to arrange an interview with a spokesperson, and/or case studies please contact: press@birthrights.org.uk

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About Birthrights

Birthrights is the UK charity that champions respectful care for women during pregnancy and childbirth by protecting human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality. We provide advice and legal information to women, train healthcare professionals to deliver rights-respecting care and campaign to change maternity policy and systems

Editors notes

1. Birthrights' letter to NHSE & I can be found on [our website](#) and our statement on maternity care during the pandemic can be found [here](#).
2. Our tool to help Trusts take decisions that are rights respecting during the pandemic can be found [here](#).
3. Details of Government directed easing of visiting restrictions for maternity services in: [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).