



Protecting human rights
in childbirth

Registered address:
Birthrights
Union House
111 New Union Street
Coventry CV1 2NT
0300 400 30 400

15th October 2020

Dear Ms Major,

I am writing to you from the human rights in childbirth charity Birthrights, regarding the visiting restrictions in place for maternity services at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights/Human Rights Act 1998 gives individuals the right to enjoy a private and family life, which is particularly important around the time of birth. Trusts are able to restrict this right by putting in place visiting restrictions but *only* if they can show that the action taken is a proportionate response to the legitimate aim of protecting the health of others during the current pandemic. We note that, despite the evidence-based benefits of birthing individuals being supported by a companion of choice, your Trust does not allow partners to attend any antenatal appointments or scans. In addition birth partners are only admitted during established labour, meaning that women have to go through induction without a known supporter. Finally, in-patient visiting is limited to one hour per day.

We note the explanation on your website that the current restrictions are due to the fact that coronavirus cases are rising in the area. However there are other Trusts facing similar or even higher levels of coronavirus cases that have less restrictions in place in their maternity services.

We would be grateful if you could publish or send us the risk assessment that quantifies the increased risk of spreading COVID within the unit (despite PPE and other mitigating factors, and the fact that most partners are from the same household) caused by relaxing restrictions, and weighs this against the known harms to pregnant women, birthing people and their families from keeping the current restrictions in place. We would ask you to confirm that as Chief Executive

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birthrights



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Officer of the Trust you are satisfied that the current restrictions are compatible with the Trust's obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998. Alternatively we urge you to review and relax these restrictions as soon as possible.

We look forward to your most urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Booker
Programmes Director - Birthrights

Cc
Chris Morley- Chief Nurse
Marie Reid - Head of Midwifery
Frankie-Mae Smith
Sheffield Maternity Voices Partnership
Tracey Cooper - Regional Chief Midwife
PALS