



Protecting human rights
in childbirth

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

22nd September 2021

Dear Mr Mears,

I am writing to you on behalf of the human rights in childbirth charity Birthrights, regarding the changes you have made to visiting arrangements in maternity services from the 10th September, reflecting wider changes to visiting within your hospitals in response to rising levels of COVID.

Whilst we understand rising COVID cases are challenging, you will be aware that all individuals have a right to family and private life under Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights. This includes the right to be together as a family around the time of birth. This right can be restricted but only if the restriction is necessary to achieve a legitimate aim such as protecting the health of others, and crucially if the restriction is *proportionate*.

There is now significant evidence about the adverse impact of visiting restrictions during the pandemic (see [this analysis](#) for example, by health economist Rachel Hunter about the mental health cost of visiting restrictions on pregnant women/birthing people). Just this week the Health and Safety Investigation Branch have published a [report](#) into stillbirths in England between April and June 2020. The report concludes that, unlike in other industries, NHS providers appear to have no system in place to enable them to weigh up any increased risks of COVID transmission against any unintended clinical consequences of changes they make to services in order to reduce the risks of COVID transmission. This is a safety issue.

We would therefore be grateful if you could send us as a matter of urgency the risk assessment/s that underpinned your decision to exclude partners from inpatient antenatal and postnatal wards, and from outpatient appointments and any non-routine scans. Please send us the minutes of any meetings discussing these decisions. Finally, please confirm that your local Maternity Services Liaison Committee was

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info@birthrights.org.uk
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Registered charity number 1151152
Patron: Nadine Montgomery

birthrights



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involved in the decision making process. Please regard the above as requests under the Freedom of Information Act although given the number of families affected right now we ask for a response by close of play on the 29th September, so that we can consider whether to take formal legal advice.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Booker
Programmes Director - Birthrights

Cc Greg Dix
Karen Jewell