

Dear Ms Booker

10<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Thank you for your letter of 15 November in relation to Covid19 restrictions to hospital visiting for birthing partners.

I am sure you will appreciate at the current time the priority in all health boards is the prevention and control of COVID infections in our healthcare settings. This is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, staff and visitors themselves.

Welsh Government guidance on hospital visiting during the Coronavirus pandemic was updated on 18 June 2021 and came into force on 5 July 2021. It can be found at the following link: <https://gov.wales/hospital-visiting-during-coronavirus-outbreak-guidance>. This guidance is being kept under constant review by the health boards and the Welsh Government. The guidance gives health boards the option to utilise Lateral Flow Device tests in addition to infection prevention and control measures which still need to be adhered to and local risk assessments.

We recognise the need for families to be together at this important time but also need to balance this with the significant impact that Covid represents to the pregnant population, the unvaccinated cohorts of women and the new Omicron variant. The hospital visiting guidance provides the ability to risk assess all of these factors with the inclusion of a supplementary statement which allows providers of maternity services following local risk assessment to determine levels of visiting in response to falling or rising levels of COVID-19 transmission in their local area. Health boards are keen to welcome essential partner support when transmission rates are low. Health boards are regularly undertaking risk assessments of all sites to assess the most appropriate level of restrictions to maintain the safest possible services for women and babies. The results of these risk assessments determine the number of people who are able to support a woman during her antenatal appointments, labour and the birth of her baby.

It is important that visiting is risk assessed and agreed locally to ensure infection prevention and control measures can be followed. Maternity service providers need to consider local environmental factors such as room size, equipment, distance between beds and the ability to maintain social distancing when making decisions to agree visiting. It is for these reasons the guidance provides an element of flexibility to service providers. This is significant in the example you provide of The Grange hospital in Aneurin Bevan which is a new purpose built unit with single room facilities and large communal areas which is able to welcome a larger number of visitors.

Health boards are able to vary guidance according to individual circumstances when additional support may be required, for example, mental health needs, a learning disability, cognitive impairment or language support needs. The updated Guidance also recognises that some women may require an essential support assistant for specific additional support e.g. a support worker or interpreter. Essential support assistants will not to be classed as visitors, and in some circumstances, where people receive care and support from a family member or partner, they may nominate this person as their essential support assistant.

I am sure you will appreciate the hospital and clinic environment cannot be directly compared to an entertainment, sporting or hospitality one, due to the number of people who may be in poor health when accessing services. Health boards have a duty to ensure care is delivered safely for all the people who need it and for the staff who see many people throughout the day.

We are actively reviewing visiting guidance and in contact with Health boards on the current measures in place, we also delivered a recent campaign in Wales to encourage vaccination in pregnancy to enable services to welcome visitors. Please be assured the safety and well-being of all mothers and babies, as well as the staff who support them is at the heart of the guidance on women being accompanied by their partner or nominated person, when accessing maternity services during the current time. I am aware that you previously met with my official Karen Jewell, the senior midwifery officer and she would be happy to meet with you again to discuss this further.

I hope this information is helpful

Yours Sincerely

**Government Business Team/Tîm Busnes y Llywodraeth**  
**Health and Social Services Group/Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol**  
**Welsh Government/Llywodraeth Cymru**