

## Division of Women, Children & Sexual Health Services

### Position Around Access for Partners, Visitors and Other Supporters of Pregnant Women and Birthing People in Maternity March 2021 – next update April 2021

**PLEASE NOTE THE VISITING RESTRICTIONS DETAILED WITHIN THIS DOCUMENT ARE CURRENT AT TIME OF PRODUCTION. RESTRICTIONS MAY CHANGE BEFORE THE NEXT UPDATE. FOR CURRENT UP TO DATE INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR COMMUNITY MIDWIFE**

This document is to help explain the changes and adaptations that are currently affecting maternity services in Buckinghamshire and to help you to make a decision about where you might like to receive your maternity care.

Restrictions to visiting across maternity are under constant review and wherever possible we will try and adopt a phased approach to both the relaxation and further restriction of services as required.

We understand that these measures are not ideal for women, birthing people and their families and are also causing anxiety and distress. We are sorry that during these unprecedented times we must put them in place for everyone's safety.

Social distancing is difficult when providing health care and the more people who come into the hospital ('footfall') the greater the amount of COVID-19 virus staff and patients could be exposed to. Increased footfall increases the risk of people catching COVID-19 in hospital, which then leads to increased numbers of staff who cannot work due to illness/isolating. Lack of staff reduces our ability to continue providing a clinically safe level of maternity care. Ultimately the safety of our staff, our birthing people, their babies and their families is our greatest priority.

To reduce the footfall into the hospital, visiting restrictions remain in place except for exceptional, extenuating circumstances or cases of specific clinical need. Transmission of the infection can be caused by people being in close contact for a period of time and also through contamination of surfaces and therefore these restrictions help to reduce the number of people attending the hospital and therefore minimise the potential transmission rates.

## **Restrictions update and rationale**

Although the daily infection rate data is looking more positive in terms of a reduction in the number of in local cases of COVID-19, we are still mindful that additional individuals in any indoor setting increases the risk of virus transmission to women and birthing individuals as well as staff. It is important that wherever possible we continue to minimise footfall through hospital premises and reduce the risk of transmission.

We will therefore be continuing the following:

**All women and birthing individuals requiring one to one care in a single room on labour ward or the birth centre or those requiring labour assessment may be accompanied by a single birth partner.**

We will not be making any further changes to restrictions at the current time (see below for full details) but this will be subject to regular review.

A birth partner or accompanying adult can be any adult who does not have symptoms of COVID-19 and is not in a self-isolation period as directed by NHS Track and Trace.

We ask that a birth partner must be from the same household as the birthing person or from the birthing person's support bubble as outlined in UK Government guidance. If your nominated birth partner is unable to attend, you can still be accompanied by a single birth partner from outside your household when you are receiving one to one care on labour ward or in the birth centre provided they comply with current UK Government guidance. They will be asked to follow hospital guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) i.e. wearing a mask while on hospital premises and will also need to provide contact details for NHS Track and Trace. Despite reference to a rapid COVID-19 test for birth partners during the recent UK Government announcement, we await further information on the availability of such a test.

NB: In exceptional, extenuating circumstances or cases of specific clinical need, a bespoke visiting/accompanying plan may be put in place, please discuss with your maternity team, for example, if you require a translator or are requiring specialised care.

There are challenges in maintaining social distancing with regard to restricted environmental space in the waiting areas and the large number of women and birthing people who are seen daily within any hospital environment. Every hospital has a different layout which is why there are different measures in place across the region, some units have a larger waiting area or assessment bay than other units and the restrictions are in line with the ability to keep families and staff safe by adhering to social distancing regulations.

For example, scan appointments – the waiting rooms may not be large enough to facilitate a partner at all scans due to social distancing regulations. Spacing out the scan appointments to allow fewer people in the waiting room at any one time would reduce scanning capacity and our ability to deliver scans in accordance with clinical need.

The challenge regarding maintaining social distancing continues on the wards. Many bays are shared and are not large enough to facilitate partners visiting at all times, whilst also keeping families and staff safe by keeping a safe distance. This is the reason why we have introduced limited allocated visiting hours on the wards. The limited visiting hours also reduce the number of staff that are likely to be exposed to the virus at any given time and the allocated slots enable safe distancing to be maintained.

Visiting restrictions are reviewed regularly and we are actively working to remove restrictions across maternity services as soon as there is a reduced risk of contracting COVID-19.

Nobody should visit if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace. If the pregnant person has symptoms or is self-isolating, they should call maternity before attending, so a scan or appointment can be rearranged, or their healthcare providers can take extra precautions. Please be assured that your birth partner will not be denied access to the labour ward or birth centre in these circumstances provided they do not display COVID-19 symptoms. If your nominated birth partner is unable to attend, you can still be accompanied by a single birth partner from outside your household when you are receiving one to one care on labour ward or in the birth centre provided they comply with current UK Government guidance.

Please **ALWAYS** contact your midwife or the maternity unit if you are at all worried about your health or that of your baby - these restrictions make our units safe to attend and we are open and here for you.

If you are pregnant and test positive for COVID-19 please let your midwife know so you can receive appropriate advice. Women and birthing people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell and being admitted to hospital so it's particularly important that if you feel your symptoms are worsening or if you are not getting better, you should seek medical help.

Please also follow the government advice regarding COVID-19.

- Wash your hands regularly and before/after touching your face or mask.
- Maintain social distancing from people not in your household/support bubble.
- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth.

Location	Antenatal appointments	Scans	Induction of labour	Labour	Caesarean section	Antenatal/Postnatal Wards
<b>Stoke Mandeville Hospital</b> <b>T: 01296 316103</b>  <b>Aylesbury Birth Centre</b> <b>T: 01296 316103</b>	<p>We cannot currently accommodate any accompanying partners/adults/children for antenatal appointments. The woman/birthing person must attend unaccompanied. There will be an option to include a partner via telephone (and video for some clinics) during these consultations.</p>	<p>One accompanying adult from the woman/birthing person's household/support bubble may attend the 12-week scan, but cannot currently attend any other scan due to social distancing requirements</p>	<p>One birth partner may attend between 7am and 7pm until the woman/birthing person is requiring one to one care in an individual room on labour ward or the birth centre during which time the birth partner can stay throughout</p>	<p>One birth partner may accompany a woman/birthing person in established labour or from the point of requiring one to one care in an individual room on labour ward or the birth centre. They can remain until the woman/birthing person is either discharged home or moves to the postnatal ward. The birth partner is asked to remain on the unit for the duration of labour to reduce footfall.</p>	<p>For planned caesarean sections, one birth partner may accompany a woman/birthing person from admission and throughout their birth until the woman /birthing person is transferred to the postnatal ward.</p> <p>For unplanned caesarean sections, one partner will usually be able to accompany as above unless a general anaesthetic is required at which point, they may be asked to wait outside.</p>	<p>One identified birth partner may visit for 3 hours each day in an allocated time slot.</p>
<b>Wycombe Birth Centre</b> <b>T: 01296 316103</b>			N/A	Unavailable	N/A	N/A
<b>Home Birth</b> <b>T: 01296 316103</b>			N/A	<p>One birth partner may accompany a woman/ birthing person throughout the duration of their labour and birth. Social distancing must be maintained, and any necessary childcare provided by another member of the household or support bubble or informal childcare bubble as outlined by UK Government guidelines.</p>	N/A	N/A