

# P-05-1035: Allow birthing partners to be present at scans, the start of labour, birth and after the birth

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 3 Tachwedd 2020  
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Reference: RS20/14079-7

**Petition Number:** P-05-1035

**Petition title:** Allow birthing partners to be present at scans, the start of labour, birth and after the birth.

**Text of petition:** Due to COVID-19 there has been restrictions on birthing partners being present for scans, labour and birth in many hospitals. There hasn't been many reviews on this topic, if any at all.

It seems unfair, and an insult to new families that they can stand 2m apart from complete strangers down the beach or even in a shop, but they cannot have their partner or birthing partner there to witness first time experiences such as scans, the baby's heart beat, labour and birth. It needs to change.



# 1. Background

The Welsh Government has published **Hospital visiting during the coronavirus outbreak: guidance** which was updated on 6 October 2020.

The guidance states that visiting, with agreement from the ward sister/charge nurse/nurse in charge, can be facilitated in some specific circumstances, as long as visitors do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 or are recovered from COVID-19 and have not been knowingly exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days. One such circumstance is:

Within non-COVID-19 areas and services:

- a birthing partner for women in labour, preferably from the same household or part of an extended household

In relation to exceptions, the guidance goes on to say:

## Exceptionality

It is recognised that guidance cannot foresee all requests for visiting nor all patient circumstances. Therefore, health boards and trusts do have the discretion, when operating the guidance, to agree to visiting requests that are not outlined in any of the categories set out above where they are satisfied the benefits to the well-being of the patient or visitor in agreeing a visit outweigh the infection control risks and any other practical difficulties in facilitating access.

Annex 2 of the guidance provides information on accompanying pregnant women to **pre-planned antenatal appointments**.

This section highlights that previous guidance on visiting to maternity hospital settings during the COVID-19 pandemic has been that a woman could be accompanied by one birthing partner and only during active labour and at birth. However, the Welsh Government states that evidence not only supports the presence of birth partners in labour and birth in improving outcomes for women and infants, but also highlights that infant bonding and attachment with parents increases in the periods around birth. The Welsh Government notes that it is aware that “lack of opportunities for partners to attend appointments such as ultrasound scans have caused distress for families at this time”.

Annex 2 of the guidance states that women can be accompanied by their partner or nominated other, preferably from the same household or part of an extended household, to any of the following except in outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic in a hospital setting:

- 12-week pregnancy dating scan
- early pregnancy clinic
- anomaly scan
- attendance at Fetal Medicine Department

The guidance notes that consideration should be given to the principles in the main guidance on accompanying patients to scheduled healthcare appointments. This may be in the following situations, which are not exhaustive:

- women with a mental health issue, a learning disability or autism, where not being accompanied would cause them to be distressed
- women with cognitive impairment who may be unable to recall health advice provided
- where the treatment/procedure is likely to cause the woman distress and the partner/nominated other can provide support

During Plenary on 13 October 2020, the Minister for Health and Social Services discussed the issue of partners being able to accompany women at various stages in their pregnancy journey and stated:

353 In terms of the guidance that we've given to the health service on partners being able to accompany women at various stages in their pregnancy journey, then we've actually recently republicised guidance that's been endorsed by the chief nurse and also a number of the royal colleges. So, I'll make sure that is reprovided to Members so that we can be clear again about the guidance that is in place, because there is no blanket ban on partners accompanying women at various stages of pregnancy, or indeed in the after support, with home visits by midwives in the very, very early days post birth, and indeed health visitors thereafter. There are some challenges in the estate that we have, where there's a challenge about social distancing, and that needs to be worked through between the hospital providing care and, indeed, the woman

and her family, but we do have, I think, a pretty clear position that I'll happily remake available to Members.

There may be occasions in individual health boards that visiting, for specific reasons, may be limited further than outlined in the guidance.

A firebreak will be in place across Wales from 6pm Friday 23 October until 12:01am on Monday 9 November 2020 which will introduce a series of restrictive measures. The Welsh Government guidance is being kept under review and may be subject to change.

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