



*Protecting human rights
in childbirth*

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

1st April 2021

Dear Jacqui, Matthew, Stephen,

The But Not Maternity Alliance is writing to the Secretary of State and to NHS England, on behalf of all pregnant women, birthing people and their partners, to urge you to set out a roadmap for easing visiting restrictions in maternity services.

Although progress has been made since NHS England issued guidance on the 14th December, there is still a significant postcode lottery across Trusts in England. Our data shows that only 38% of maternity services across the UK allow fathers/partners to attend non-standard scans where there are concerns about the baby, partners are only able to attend antenatal appointments in 25% of the country, and there is huge variation in whether partners are allowed to visit their partner and baby on the postnatal ward. Only around 8.5% of services allow second birth partners even though all healthcare staff have been offered the vaccination, testing is available, care takes place in single rooms, and only a small proportion of women want a second birth partner.

We ran a webinar with representatives from around 47 English Maternity Voices Partnerships on Monday 22nd March and came away with some clear messages from participants about the current guidance:

- There needs to be a unified policy across England. There is too much unwarranted variation across maternity services.

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Registered charity number 1151152
Patron: Nadine Montgomery

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- More clarity is needed around the 2m social distancing requirement being an aspiration but not a necessity. Many units have implemented creative solutions to address the barriers to letting partners back in. But some units cannot have partners back into all areas of maternity services and maintain 2m at all times. As the guidance already recognises, testing and other protective measures mitigate this risk.

- Home testing of partners must be supported. It is not feasible for many Trusts to test both the person giving birth and their partner on site in terms of space and staffing. (We understand home testing is due to be rolled out from the 12th April which is great to hear).

- Both staff and service users want to understand what evidence has been gathered about the risk to staff and other service users of bringing back partners/visitors into different areas of maternity services, and how much testing and vaccination reduces these risks.

We urge NHS England to address these concerns and to publish revised guidance and a timetable for ending visiting restrictions in maternity services as soon as possible. We cannot return to a situation where people are able to go to the shops, the pub and the hairdresser, to attend a wedding or a funeral but not go through the journey of maternity care together. All health and social care staff have been offered a vaccination and testing is widely available. These restrictions can no longer be justified.

We look forward to your most urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

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Maria Booker, Birthrights
Nadia Higson, AIMS
Joeli Brearley, Pregnant then Screwed
Abbi Leibert and Holly Avis, But Not Maternity Petition
Zelle Baggaley, Birth Trauma Association,
Katherine Jones, The Fatherhood Institute
Evelien Docherty, Make Birth Better
Scott Mair, Paternal Mental Health
AJ Silver, Queer Birth Club
Kate Ewert, Doula UK

