

11 April 2022

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Re: Official Information Act request – OIA 1175 - Covid19 Positive Birthing People and Support People

I refer to your Official Information Act request dated **12 March 2022** requesting the following information:

We are writing to you to request information about your policies regarding birthing people who test positive for Covid19 and their ability to have a support person of their choosing throughout their labour and birth in your hospitals and birth centres.

We are concerned about reports from consumers and patients who have been denied access to support people and advised that they will be birthing alone if they or their support person test positive for Covid19.

This is against the WHO guidelines that were published in 2020 that advise that access to a support person of the birthing person's choosing in labour and birth is a fundamental right of accessing safe and equitable care in labour and birth. More information about the World Health Organisation's stance on this issue can be found [here](#).

We understand that this is an extremely busy and high pressure time for all district health boards and that patient care amongst the current Covid19 surge is a priority. However these issues and being able to rectify them are time sensitive and require urgent attention so that no birthing whānau are subject to discriminatory and unsafe care throughout their labour and birth.

RESPONSE

In most cases, we can facilitate whānau support this for māmā and their birthing partners with COVID-19, through having appropriate infection, prevention and control measures in place and using dedicated ward rooms to keep everyone safe and minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The Women's Health service operates in line with the Auckland DHB's Whānau as Partners in Care and Visiting Policy and the following guideline is specific to our service:

To maintain support for women in labour who are COVID positive or whose birth partner is COVID positive, birthing partners are able to stay with them on the ward to provide support during labour, birth and post-natal care.

The following guidelines are in place to support patients, whānau and staff.

The support person or birth partner:

- must follow the isolation directives as guided by staff and agree to wear N95 mask and appropriate PPE as required.
- are required to stay in the woman's room for the duration of admission including labour and birth however if in the Women's Assessment Unit (WAU) they may need to leave the room for access to showers etc. They may not leave WAU at any time.
- if the patient is transferred to the Operating Room (OR), the support person is not allowed into the OR and will be asked to wait in the postnatal COVID space allocated to their partner or to leave the hospital. In very rare circumstances where there are significant extenuating circumstances such as expected fetal death, or if the partner is required as an interpreter to facilitate regional anaesthetic, partners could be given dispensation to accompany their partner in OR.
- are required to be the same person and cannot swap out with another support person during the stay.
- where at all possible we will support partners to stay after baby is born however they must continue to isolate with mother and baby so as to provide support as whānau/ partner in care. They will not be able to return to the hospital if they leave as they then must isolate at home.

As noted above, COVID-19 positive birthing partners are not usually able to accompany māmā into our operating theatres for a caesarean section birth. During a caesarean section, a full surgical team is present to ensure that māmā and pēpi receive timely, high-quality clinical care. We looked closely at whether we could have COVID-19 positive support people in our Women's Health operating theatres during birth but the clinical recommendation was that it wouldn't be possible to maintain appropriate measures while keeping every safe and ensuring that clinical care is not impacted.

You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.govt.nz or Freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Auckland DHB website.

Yours sincerely



Ailsa Claire, OBE
Chief Executive