



## What do I do when I am pregnant in Ireland?

Produced by Health Information and Advocacy Centre in partnership  
with Ethnic Minority Health Forum

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### About this publication



This is a series of fact sheets produced by Cairde's Health Information and Advocacy Centre on how to access health services in Ireland. Other topics in the series include:

- ◆ What do I do to see a doctor in Ireland?
- ◆ When do I use a public hospital in Ireland?

This fact sheet has been produced as an information guide only. Every effort has been made to ensure that all information is accurate at the time of publication: November 2007.

If you notice any errors please contact the Health Information and Advocacy Centre at 01-8552111 or email: [hiac@cairde.ie](mailto:hiac@cairde.ie)

### About Cairde

Cairde is a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among ethnic minority communities by improving ethnic minority access to health services and participation in health planning and delivery.

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## 1) Being pregnant

### A) Maternity services and entitlements in Ireland

Public maternity care in Ireland is free to all pregnant women who are “ordinarily resident” in Ireland. A person who is ordinarily resident means someone who has lived, or intends to live in Ireland for one year or more and has legal papers to be in the country. This includes migrant workers, students, refugees, asylum seekers, people with leave to remain status etc. Free public maternity care in Ireland is called the Mother and Infant Care Scheme. Under this scheme all these things are free in a public hospital:

- ◆ before birth care
- ◆ care during the birth of your child
- ◆ hospital stay costs for mother and baby in a public ward

Sometimes, maternity hospitals send out bills to people after their baby is born. This happens when people do not give enough information to the maternity hospital that they are “ordinarily resident” and have legal papers to be in the country. If this happens, you should write or ring the Health Service Executive (HSE) office and explain your situation. Papers to prove residency are:

- ◆ Gardai or GNIB immigration card
- ◆ work permit
- ◆ P60 completed form
- ◆ marriage certificate if husband or wife is working and paying tax.

The HSE will organise a meeting with you to prove you are a legal resident. Once this is done they will give you a ‘category 2’ letter. You bring this letter to your hospital to prove that you do not have to pay.

The contact details are:

HSE,

Dublin Mid Leinster,

Overseas Section

Dublin 8.

Tel: (01) 6352374

## B) What do I do when I am pregnant in Ireland?

If you think you are pregnant, you should visit your family doctor (GP). You may already have done a pregnancy test, but your doctor(GP) will do another test to confirm you are pregnant. Usually doctors( GPs) take a urine test, but if they are not sure, they will ask you to do a blood test. When the doctor (GP) confirms that you are pregnant they will talk to you about care before the birth also called antenatal care.

Care before the birth of your child is given to pregnant women by doctors and midwives during the time of pregnancy through to the birth of the child. The doctor (GP) will ask you what hospital you want to go to and if you wish to use a public or a private hospital. Your doctor (GP) will then give you a letter which you bring to the maternity hospital of your choice. If you go to a public hospital, all maternity services will be free, but you have to fill out an application form for Mother and Infant Care Scheme. Your family doctor (GP) should have the necessary forms.

If you go to a public hospital, all maternity services will be free, but if you go to a private hospital you will have to pay a charge.

(See table below on the page 12 for how much it costs)

## C) My first visit

To visit the hospital when you are pregnant you will need to call them to get a date and time for your first visit (to make an appointment). Your first visit to the

hospital can be any time from 12 to 20 weeks in the pregnancy. You will speak to a midwife, the nurse who works with pregnant women, who will ask you questions about your health now and before you were pregnant. This will also be a chance for you to ask questions about the care you could get.

You will be asked for urine and a blood sample for different tests which will be explained. Finally, they may check your weight. In some hospitals, you may have an ultrasound scan (a special machine is used to check your baby inside you) on your first visit, but in other hospitals you will have it when you are about 20 weeks pregnant. The visit lasts about two hours. If your pregnancy is going well, the next visit will be much shorter.

#### D) My other visits

Your midwife will explain to you about your other visits. You will have two choices. You can have all your antenatal care check-ups in the hospital, or you can have some check-ups with your family doctor (GP) between visits to the hospital. If you share your visits, your family doctor (GP) will ask you to sign a form which allows them to do this.

At each visit you will be asked to give a urine sample, your blood pressure will be taken and you will be examined. This is the time for you to ask any questions or talk about any worries about your pregnancy. After your tests your doctor or midwife will tell you when to come for your next visit to the hospital or to your family doctor (GP).

#### F) What to do if I have been subjected to female genital mutilation and expecting a baby?

There are no specialised services for women who have had genital mutilation. If you want to talk about this you can contact your family doctor (GP) who will refer

you to a medical expert (a doctor who specialises in this area) for you to speak to. If you are pregnant you can also talk about it and plan with them for the delivery of your baby.

## 2) Classes before birth (Antenatal classes)

### A) Things I learn from classes before the birth

In classes before the birth or antenatal classes you will be given information about pregnancy, the birth of your baby and baby care. The classes will also give you the chance to talk about any worries you might have with other pregnant women. Many antenatal classes give you information about the time just before the birth and during the birth of a baby, although they will also talk to you about how to care for your baby and getting ready to be a mother.

These classes happen in your hospital and you will need to telephone them to book your place. Classes are generally for pregnant women only or for them and their partner or husband. These classes start from about 30 weeks into your pregnancy.

These are some of the other things you will learn from the classes before the birth:

- ◆ Looking after your health during pregnancy
- ◆ Growth and changes of the baby during pregnancy
- ◆ Different ways to deal with when the baby is coming
- ◆ Pain relief during the labour/delivery of your baby
- ◆ When to go into hospital
- ◆ What happens during the birth of your baby
- ◆ Help with breastfeeding
- ◆ How you are feeling about being a parent
- ◆ Physical care of your baby



## Getting back to work and how will you take care of

your baby

### B) How much do I need to pay for the classes?

Before birth classes held by your local public maternity hospital are free but if you want to go to private classes you will have to pay. Phone your maternity hospital for more information.

### C) Will I be given time off for antenatal classes if I am working?

If you get pregnant while working you can, under employment law, take time off to go for hospital visits and classes. If it is your first pregnancy, you will get paid time off to go to 5 out of 8 classes. You will not be able to go to any more classes in other pregnancies in the same employment. If for example, you become ill and cannot go to all 5 classes at the time, you may carry over your entitlement to paid leave from employment to go to untaken classes, to your following pregnancies.

If it is your second pregnancy and over, you will only be paid for time off to go to only one class of antenatal classes. You will not have any paid time off in other pregnancies in that work. If you are unable to go to some classes you can use that paid time off work to go to classes if you are pregnant in the future.

The father of the baby can get paid time off of work to go to the two antenatal classes immediately before to the birth in one pregnancy.

To get this time off you must write to the people who you are working for two weeks before you want the time off.

You can also get time off for some medical visits after the birth of your baby.

### 3) Giving birth

#### A) Hospital birth

When you come into hospital to have your baby, you will be met by a midwife. A doctor will see you if there are problems. You may not have met the midwives or doctors before this. After the birth of your baby, you will be moved to the public ward for your stay, for about three days. A small number of hospitals now offer a chance to go home earlier from hospital.

#### B) Home birth

In Ireland, having your baby at home is not very common; women have been having babies in hospitals for many years. You can have a baby at home but there are only a small number of midwives and doctors who have experience of helping women to have babies at home. Where a woman chooses to have home birth and the HSE cannot provide the service, some areas in the HSE provide a grant towards the cost the services of a private midwife.

Your local health centre will have a list of midwives and doctors who take care of births at home. When you pick them they have to fill out a form which allows you to have free care and the HSE will offer you a home birth pack.

You can also have your home birth through private care but you will have to pay the full cost.

You can contact independent midwives through the Home Birth Association of Ireland:

1 Lumiera,  
Rocky Valley Road,

Kilmacanogue,  
County Wicklow.

Tel: (01) 2761812 or 8206940

E-mail: [homebirth@eircom.net](mailto:homebirth@eircom.net)

Website: [www.homebirth.ie](http://www.homebirth.ie)

#### 4) After birth (Postnatal)

##### A) Baby after birth

Health checks for your baby begin after the baby is born. Once the midwife and the doctor feel that the baby is healthy, they will let the baby leave the delivery room with your partner, husband or the person who was with you.

If the baby is sick, it will be taken care of in the delivery room. The doctor and other members of the healthcare team work together to help the baby clear excess fluid and begin breathing.

Babies who may have problems at birth may be those born too soon (premature) or had a difficult delivery. Newborn babies who have problems are often put into a special area of the hospital called the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Before a baby leaves the delivery area, bracelets with the same number are put on the baby and mother. Babies often have two, on the wrist and ankle. These should be checked each time the baby comes or goes from your room.

Your baby will get a number of vaccinations (injections against some illnesses) in the days and months after he/she is born. The doctor in the hospital and your doctor or your public health nurse will give you all the information about all these injections. All vaccinations are free.

## B) Mother after birth

After the birth of your baby, the health staff checks on you in case you have any problems before you leave the delivery room. You will stay in the hospital for three days or more depending on your progress. When you go home, you will be visited by a public health nurse from your local health centre who will give you support and advice. If you had a home birth your midwife will visit you.

## C) Mother and baby health check

Your local public health nurse will call to you a couple of days after you leave the hospital to check you and baby and to see how you both getting on. It is very important to make sure that the hospital has the address where you and your baby are going to live after you leave the hospital because a public health nurse will do a heel prick test for your baby. This test is done to babies who are between three and five days old and helps to detect 5 different rare but serious disorders. Early detection will enable the baby to be treated quickly and can prevent severe illness, possible brain damage, blindness or death.

In Ireland, mother and baby get a health check six weeks after a baby is born. This takes place either at the hospital or with your family doctor (GP). The baby will have checks to see how he/she is getting on, for example an eye or hearing test done by a public health nurse at your local health centre. Your public health nurse will let you know about all the stages at the checks as it takes place. All these checks are free.

If you have any worries about how your baby is doing you should feel free to talk the public health nurse about it.

## D) What to do if I want my male child to get circumcised?

If you want your male child to get circumcised, the first step is to contact your doctor who will give you a letter which lets you to go to the nearest hospital for the operation. Usually, you will meet a medical person to talk about it and after that the date for the operation will be set. Waiting time for this is six months to one year (depending on the waiting list).

## 5) Who has to pay for maternity services?

### A) Cost of maternity services

All public maternity services are free to people as long as they have applied for the Mother and Infant Care Scheme. To apply for this scheme you have to be “ordinarily resident” in Ireland and have the legal papers to be here. If you are a visitor or tourist in Ireland, you will have to pay the full cost of health services. As a visitor, you are advised to take insurance cover before you travel.

If you are going to a private hospital will have to pay all cost of the services offered.

This table gives a list of services offered and their costs

Services	Public	Semi - Private	Private
Normal Delivery	Free	€540.00	€3,000 to €4,000
Caesarean Section	Free	€584.00	€3,500 to €4,000
Paediatrician in-charge	Free	€100.59	€100.59
Epidural Anaesthesia	Free	€289.00	€289.00
Pathology	Free	€92.50	€92.50
Special Care Unit per night	Free	€540.00	€540.00
Consultant Deposit Fee	Free	€250.00	€250.00
Ultrasound Scan (Each)	Free	€100.00 (mother) €75.00 (baby)	€100.00 (mother) €75.00 (baby)
Room Per Night	Free	€540.00	€689.00

## 6) How can I get help with my medical costs?\*

- A) Drug Payment Scheme
- B) The Long-Term Illness Scheme
- C) Health/Medical expenses relief

\*For all of the above please see hospital leaflet.

## 7) Private Health Insurance

### A) What is Private Health Insurance and who can buy it?

Some people buy private health insurance. Private health insurance is used to pay for your health care in hospital or in GP practices if you cannot get a medical card or GP visit card. You pay a certain amount to the insurance company on a monthly or yearly basis. Then, when you fall ill and need treatment, the insurance company will contribute to your bill depending on your agreement. It is a voluntary choice. You do not get money back if you are not sick.

You cannot buy insurance for the purpose of maternity cover while you are pregnant. You have to buy the cover before you are pregnant.

A number of companies offer private health insurance in Ireland. If you pay any of these companies monthly they should be able to pay most of your health and medicine costs.

These companies mostly pay for:

- ♦ Staying in a hospital
- ♦ A visit to a hospital
- ♦ When you are having a baby
- ♦ Getting better after being sick
- ♦ Psychiatric treatment and substance abuse

If you are getting health insurance you must tell the insurance companies all the information you know about your health. If you do not then they can decide not to pay for your health or medicine costs.

Each health insurance company can ask you for different fees. This annual fee will be set by what health or medicine costs you want paid now or in the future. The fee does not increase in the future if you get the health insurance company to pay for health or medicine costs now. Health insurance for people under 18 years old, 18 to 23 years old, in full-time education or retired people may be able to pay lower than normal health insurance fees.

If you have problems getting private health insurance or need more information about it you can contact:

Health Insurance Authority

Canal House,

Canal Road,

Dublin 6.

Tel: (01) 406 0080

Fax: (01) 406 0081

## 8) A list of maternity hospitals in Ireland

### **Bon Secours Maternity Hospital**

College Road  
Cork  
Co.Cork  
Tel: (021) 542 807

### **Cavan General Hospital**

Cavan  
Co. Cavan  
Tel: (049) 61388

### **Coombe Women's Hospital**

Dolphin's Barn  
Dublin 8  
Tel: (01) 408 5200  
Fax :(01) 453 6033

### **Erinville Hospital**

Western Road  
Cork,  
Co. Cork  
Tel: (021) 275 211  
Fax: (021) 275 502

### **Letterkenny General Hospital**

Letterkenny  
Co. Donegal  
Tel: (074) 258 88

### **Longford / Westmeath General Hospital**

Mullingar  
Co. Westmeath  
Tel: (044) 40221  
Fax: (044) 43155

### **Louth County Hospital**

Dublin Road  
Dundalk  
Co. Louth  
Tel: (042) 933 4701  
Fax: (042) 932 6000

**Mayo General Hospital**

Castlebar

Co. Mayo

Tel: (094) 21733

Fax :(094) 21454

**Monaghan General Hospital**

Monaghan

Co.Monaghan

Tel: (047) 81811

Fax :(047) 84437

**Mount Carmel Hospital**

Braemor Park

Churchtown

Dublin 14

Tel: (01) 492 2211

Fax: (01) 492 2094

**National Maternity Hospital**

Holles Street

Dublin 2

Tel: (01) 637 3100

Fax: (01) 676 6623

**Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital**

Drogheda

Co. Louth

Tel: (041) 983 7601

Fax: (041) 983 3868

**Portiuncula Hospital**

Ballinasloe

Co. Galway

Tel: (0905) 42140

Fax: (0905) 42916

**Portlaoise Hospital**

Portlaoise

Co. Laois

Tel: (0502) 21364

Fax: (0502) 22986

**Rotunda Hospital**

Parnell Square

Dublin 1

Tel: (01) 873 0700

Fax: (01) 873 0932

**Sligo General Hospital**

The Mall

Co. Sligo

Tel: (071) 71111

Fax: (071) 45520

**St.Finbarr's Hospital**

Douglas Road

Cork Co. Cork

Tel: (021) 966 555

Fax: (021) 966 563

**St.Joseph's County Medical  
and Maternity Hospital**

Clonmel

Co. Tipperary

Tel: (052) 21900

Fax: (052) 23975

**St.Luke's General Hospital**

Freshford Road

Kilkenny

Co. Kilkenny

Tel: (056) 511 33

Fax: (056) 211 49

**St.Munchins Regional Maternity Hospital**

Ennis Road Limerick

Co. Limerick

Tel: (061) 327 455

Fax: (061) 326 086

**Tralee General Hospital**

Tralee

Co. Kerry

Tel: (066) 712 6222

Fax: (066) 712 6241

**University College Hospital**

Newcastle Road

Galway

Co. Galway

Tel: (091) 524 222

Fax: (091) 526 588

**Waterford Regional hospital**

Dunmore Road

Co. Waterford

Tel: (051) 873321

Fax: (051) 879495

**Wexford General Hospital**

Wexford Town

Co. Waterford

Tel: (053) 42233

Fax: (053) 41910

## Useful Addresses

[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

This is the website of the Citizens Information Board (CIB). The site gives information on the social and civil rights of everyone in Ireland.

[www.dohc.ie](http://www.dohc.ie)

This is the website of the Department of Health and Children with responsibility for policy in relation to the Irish health services.

[www.healthfacts.ie](http://www.healthfacts.ie)

This is the website of Cairde's Health Information and Advocacy Centre. On this site you can find out more about your health, how to make your way through the health services and how to get involved in health.

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

The Health Service Executive (HSE) website gives health and personal social service information for everyone living in Ireland.

[www.oasis.gov.ie](http://www.oasis.gov.ie)

This is an Irish government website that gives information on public services in Ireland.

## Publications

### Series one

What do I need to do to see a doctor in Ireland?

### Series two

How do I use a public hospital in Ireland?

### Series three

What do I do when I am pregnant in Ireland?