

# Ok after the old



**5** Libby Jones relaxes at home ready to savour her freshly pulled pint which has been poured and collected in line with social distancing guidelines

## Top consultant tells women hospitals are safe for new arrivals

By **Niamh Griffin** and **Valerie Hanley**

**MATERNITY** hospitals have isolation wards ready for women who develop coronavirus, and a leading consultant has reassured women that hospitals are ready and safe.

This comes as figures from the Department of Health this week show an Irish baby less than one year old has Covid-19, and there has been one case in London of a baby diagnosed with the virus at birth.

However, Chinese research accepted in Ireland and the UK shows mothers do not transmit the illness to babies during pregnancy.

Dr Cliona Murphy is head of the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and a consultant at the Coombe maternity hospital in Dublin.

She said: 'The message I want to get out for women is hospitals are preparing, they are safe and will continue to be safe. What I've been saying to patients is that hopefully they won't get it, but even if they do get it, they should be OK.'

About 5,000 babies are born in Ireland every month, meaning the longer this crisis goes on, the more likely it is a mother will give birth while sick with Covid-19.

A spokeswoman for the Coombe said it has an isolation strategy already in place. The hospital has enough breast milk supplies, if needed, for premature babies, she said.

The Rotunda has a separate



**REASSURANCE:** Dr Murphy says isolation wards already set up

delivery area for women who have coronavirus, with a 'red zone' for postnatal care. An 'orange zone' is for symptomatic patients who are not confirmed as ill. Both outpatients and the emergency rooms have separate areas for women in either situation.

Dr Murphy said a key issue was reducing the number of people who come into hospitals. This sadly includes limiting the time partners of pregnant women spend in hospitals.

Patients have been creative in working around the restrictions, she said. Many women shared having a scan on video app Facetime to partners outside the hospital.

Medics strongly advise new parents to continue social distancing after taking their baby home, meaning doting grandparents are for now only

visible on screens. 'It is a sacrifice for them,' Dr Murphy said.

Advice on breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact has not changed for women without respiratory symptoms, she said.

Guidelines recommended by the institute, issued in the UK and based on the Chinese experience, indicate no risk of transmitting the disease through breastmilk.

The National Maternity Hospital is advising women with Covid-19 that they can breastfeed but should wear a face mask.

Online pregnancy groups have discussed home births as an alternative. However, Dr Murphy warned this was not suitable for all women.

Meanwhile, the MoS has learnt that eight key medical staff at Dublin's National Maternity Hospital are in self-isolation for two weeks after a pregnant woman who was thought to be free of coronavirus later tested positive.

The frontline workers were sent home last week after they were exposed to a patient they had been told had tested negative for Covid-19.

The expectant mother was being treated in an isolation unit and staff were already taking precautions while they waited for a test result from the National Virus Reference Laboratory.

The incident shows the real pressure that frontline medical staff are under.

The National Maternity Hospital in Dublin, would not comment on the case.

around by porters and everyone must be fed.

'One concern raised with me is many of these nurses re-applying are coming from the nursing home sector. There could be attractions in a pension, better benefits. But we know if this virus gets into nursing

homes it will be devastating. Nurses are needed everywhere.'

He said there are about 135,000 full and part-time workers in the HSE but the home help systems need to change.

He said: 'This is a risk situation now. A carer might go into five or

six houses, they will need to be briefed on coronavirus but should also have sanitisers and protective clothing.'

Maternity hospitals are worried about staff shortages.

Dr Cliona Murphy, head of the Institute of Obstetricians and

Gynaecology said: 'We are conscious as obstetricians there are not that many of us, and we are hugely dependent on our midwifery colleagues. One of our big worries

### 'Home carers are visiting five or six houses'

is if our midwifery colleagues become sick that would cause potential issues.'

The Rotunda is considering using retired staff to answer helplines, working remotely.

And a spokeswoman for the Coombe said: 'We have received offers of help from some retired Coombe staff, for which we are very grateful.'

Dr Murphy said consultants are already doubling up for weekend

on-call duty so if one person becomes ill there is someone to answer emergency calls.

She said at least one maternity hospital already has a full Covid-19 team.

GPs are the first port of call for people wanting a test.

Dr Michael Harty, previously a TD for Clare said: 'We are settling into a new reality. Patients have to make appointments now. If they just turn up, we ask them to wait in the car.'

He said access to testing is an issue but that is improving as more centres open up.

On one day this week he needed to order four tests.

He said: 'Ordering the tests is relatively simple, however there are 2,500 GPs in the country and if every GP orders just four then you have 10,000 a day. I don't know if the HSE has the capacity for this.'

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## Joe's big Mother's Day mission

THIRD-generation flower seller Joe Duffy, left, is on a heroic mission to save Mother's Day this weekend by making sure Irish mummies can still feel loved even if they can't hug their offspring due to social distancing.

The father of two was working last night at the old Dublin Flower Market.

Joe's own grandfather sold flowers at the old Smithfield Flower Market, right, during the Spanish flu epidemic a century ago.

