

**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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## **Introduction**

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

- **What do I do to see a doctor in Ireland?**
- **How do I access public hospital services in Ireland?**

## **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.**

### **Disclaimer**

**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 – June 2007.**

**If you notice any errors please contact Sarah Duku at: [hiac@cairde.ie](mailto:hiac@cairde.ie)**

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## 1) Being pregnant

### A) Maternity services and entitlements in Ireland

All pregnant women who are “ordinarily resident” in Ireland are entitled to free public maternity care as long as they have papers to live 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 papers/documents to be in the country. The entitlements include all antenatal care, care during and the birth of your child and hospital accommodation costs for mother and baby in a public ward. Sometimes, hospitals send out bills to individuals who do not provide enough evidence of the residency in Ireland. Documents to prove residency are: gardai immigration card, work permit, P60 / marriage certificate if spouse is working and paying tax. If this happens, you should write or ring the HSE regional office and explain your situation. They will book you in for an appointment to establish your residency. Once the HSE establishes your residency they will give you a category 2 letter that you will have to bring to your hospital to waive the payment.

The contact details are:

**HSE,  
Dublin Mid Leinster,  
Overseas Section  
Dublin 8.  
Tel: 63502379/6352374**

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

If you think you are pregnant, the first step is to visit your family doctor/GP. You may already have done a pregnancy test, but your doctor will do another test to confirm your pregnancy. Usually doctors take a urine test, but if they are not sure, they will ask you to do a blood test. When the doctor confirms that you are pregnant he/she will discuss your plans for antenatal care. Antenatal means ‘before birth’. Antenatal care is care given to pregnant women by doctors and midwives during the time of pregnancy through to the birth of the baby. The doctor will ask you what hospital you want to attend and whether you want to attend a public or a private maternity hospital. Your doctor will then give you a referral letter for you to bring to the maternity hospital of your choice. It is important to note that if you choose to attend a public hospital, all maternity services will be free, but if you attend a private hospital you will have to pay a full charge. (See table below for all charges)

### C) My first visit

You will have to make an appointment before you visit a hospital. The hospital will then assign you a date to attend. Your first visit to the hospital can be any time from 12 to 20 weeks in the pregnancy. You will first speak to a midwife, who will ask you a range of questions about your health and medical history. This will also be an opportunity for you to ask questions about your care and the range of services that are available to you. You will be asked for a urine sample 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 on your first visit, but in others you will have it at around 20 weeks. The visit lasts approximately two hours. If your pregnancy is normal, subsequent visits will be much shorter.

## **D) My other visits**

Your midwife will explain to you about your other visits. You will have two options. One is to attend all your antenatal care in the hospital, or share the visit between the hospital and your family doctor/GP. This is totally your choice. If you choose to share your visits, your family doctor/GP will ask you to sign a form which allows him/her to carry out the service.

At each visit you will be asked to provide 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 worries related to your pregnancy. After your tests your doctor/midwife will tell you when to come for your next visit whether at the hospital or to your family doctor/GP.

## **2) Classes before birth (Antenatal classes)**

### **A) Things I learn from antenatal classes**

In antenatal classes you will be given information about pregnancy, before you give birth, the birth of your baby and baby care. The classes will also give you the chance to discuss any concerns you might have with other pregnant women. Many antenatal classes focus on 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 adjustment to parenthood.

Antenatal classes are provided by your hospital and you will need to telephone them to book your place. Classes are generally offered for pregnant women alone, or for them and their partner/husband. These classes start from about 30 weeks. These are some of the other things you will learn from your classes:

- Looking after your health during pregnancy
- Growth and development of the baby during pregnancy
- Options for labour and delivery
- Pain relief during labour
- When to go into hospital
- What to expect during labour
- Breastfeeding support and advice
- Emotional aspects of becoming a parent
- Physical care of your baby
- Returning to work/childcare arrangements

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

Antenatal classes held by your local public maternity hospital are **free of charge** but if you want to attend private classes you will have to pay a full charge. Contact your maternity hospital for more information.

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

If you become pregnant while in employment you are entitled, under employment law, to take time off to attend antenatal appointments. You are also entitled to attend some antenatal classes. If it is your first pregnancy, you will only be entitled to paid time off to attend 5 out of 8 sets of your classes. You will not be entitled any more classes in other pregnancies in the same employment. If for example, you become ill and cannot attend all 5 classes at the time, you may carry over your entitlement to paid leave from employment to attend untaken classes, to your following pregnancies.

If it is your second pregnancy and over, you will only have the right to paid time off to attend **only one set of antenatal classes**. You will not have any paid time off in other pregnancies in that particular employment. If for any reason you are unable to attend some classes due to reasons beyond your control (i.e., premature birth, illness, miscarriage, stillbirth) you can carry over your entitlement to paid time off work to attend any untaken classes to your subsequent pregnancies

Expectant fathers have a once-off right to paid time off work to attend the two antenatal classes immediately prior to the birth. This entitlement **does not extend to every pregnancy** while the woman is in employment – it is just a once-off right only.

In order to take this time off work, the employee must notify their employer in writing at least two weeks before classes commence, outlining the dates and times of the classes. Employers can request written evidence of the classes (dates, times, etc...)

Similarly, you are entitled to time off for medical visits after the birth of your baby.

## **3) Giving birth**

### **A) Hospital birth**

When you come into hospital for labour and delivery, the baby will be delivered by staff midwives and may not see a doctor unless you experience complications. You may not have met the midwives or doctors who attend your labour and delivery. After the birth of your baby, you will be moved to the public ward for your stay, generally for about three days. A small number of hospitals now offer early discharge schemes, allowing you to go home early from hospital with follow-up care.

### **B) Home birth**

In Ireland, home birth is not very common because of the hospital birth tradition that has existed for many years. However, women have the right to choose where they

want to have their babies although it can be difficult sometimes for home birth because there are few experienced midwives in home delivery. 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 of contracting the services of a private midwife.

If you want to have a home birth, you should write to your local health office/centre and ask them to send you a list of all the midwives/doctors who might help you at the delivery of your baby.

When you receive the list from your local health office and choose a midwife/doctor, you will need to ask them to fill out a form of application for maternity care. This will entitle you to free antenatal, delivery and postnatal services. The HSE will also provide you with a maternity pack containing all you need for your home birth.

There are also domiciliary midwives who will help you with your home birth. The difference though is that you have to make the arrangement yourself and inform the HSE about that. Some HSE areas will contribute towards the cost of the birth.

You can also choose to 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 2761812/8206940**  
**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 immediately after the baby is delivered. Once the midwife and the doctor feel that the baby is healthy, they will let the baby leave the delivery room under the care of your partner or the person who accompanied you.

If there are signs that the baby is not doing well, treatment can be given right in the delivery room. The physician and other members of the healthcare team work together to help the baby clear excess fluid and begin breathing.

Babies who may have difficulty at birth including those born prematurely, those who experienced a difficult delivery, or those with birth defects will receive special care. Newborn babies who need intensive medical attention are often admitted into a special area of the hospital called the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Before a baby leaves the delivery area, identification bracelets with identical numbers are placed 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.

A day or two and a few months later after the birth of your baby, he/she will undergo a number of vaccinations against some illnesses. The doctor in the hospital and your family doctor/GP or your public health nurse will provide you with all the information about all these vaccinations. **All vaccinations are free of charge.**

### **B) Mother after birth**

After the birth of your baby, you are checked and monitored immediately for any conditions before you leave the delivery room. For example, if you had a caesarean section, you will be taken to a recovery room for at least an hour before you are taken to the ward. 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 for some support and advice regarding you, and the care of your newborn. If you had a home birth your midwife will have visited you.

### **C) Mother and baby check – ups**

In Ireland, mother and baby normally undergo a check-up six weeks after a baby is born. This takes place either at the hospital or with your family doctor/GP. The baby will have developmental checks like eye test, hearing and so on done by a public health nurse at your local health centre. Your public health nurse will inform you of all the stages at which the checks will take place. **All these checks are free of charge.**

If you have any concerns about your baby's progress, you should feel free to discuss it with your public health nurse.

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

### **A) Cost of maternity services**

All maternity services are free to all attending public care as long as they are ordinarily resident in Ireland. If you are a visitor in Ireland, you will have to pay the full cost of the service provided to you. As a visitor, you are advised to take insurance cover before you travel.

If you are attending a private hospital will have to pay a full cost of the services provided.

The table below gives you a breakdown of services provided and costs related to the services:

Services	Public	Semi - Private	Private
Normal Delivery	Free	€540.00	€3000.00 to €4000.00
Caesarean Section	Free	€584.00	€3500.00 to €4000.00
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 is entitled to buy private health insurance?

Some people choose to buy private health insurance. Private health insurance is used to pay for your health care in hospital or in GP practices if you are not entitled to a medical card or GP only visit card. You pay a certain amount to the company on a monthly or yearly basis. Then, when you fall ill and require 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.

Anyone can buy private health insurance as long as you have the right papers to live in Ireland. **It is important to note however that you cannot buy insurance for the purpose of maternity cover while you are pregnant. You have to buy the cover before you are pregnant.**

## **B) What are the companies out there?**

A number of companies offer voluntary private health insurance in Ireland.

- The **Voluntary Health Insurance Board (VHI)** is the largest provider of voluntary private health insurance. It is a statutory body whose board is appointed by the Minister for Health and Children.
- **QUINN-healthcare** is the second largest provider of voluntary private health insurance in Ireland.
- **Vivas** is the third voluntary private health insurance provider to operate in Ireland.

## **C) How much will it cost me?**

Each health insurance company has its own cost depending on the cover you want. However, unlike motor insurance or life insurance, matters such as age, sex, sexual orientation, health or past record of claims do not affect the price charged for insurance.

To find out more on costs, please contact them directly on the following numbers:

- **Voluntary Health Insurance Board (VHI):** 1850 44 44 44
- **QUINN-healthcare Helpline:** 1890 700 890
- **Vivas** 1850 717 717

## **D) How can I buy the service?**

You buy the service directly from the health insurance company that you wish to join. Each company must abide by the general rules described but, after that, they are free to make their own rules. If you are experiencing problems with getting cover, you should contact the Department of Health and Children or the Health Insurance Authority

For more information on private health insurance see the GP leaflet or contact:

**Health Insurance  
Authority,  
Canal House,  
Canal Road,  
Dublin 6.  
Tel: (01) 406 0080  
Fax: (01) 406 0081**

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

**This is a website developed and maintained by the Citizen Information Board (CIB). The site provides 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.homebirth.ie](http://www.homebirth.ie) -

**The Home Birth Association website provides information to those considering or opting for home birth.**

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

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

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

**This is an Irish government website that provides 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 access public  
hospital services in Ireland?

### **Series three**

What do I do when I am  
pregnant in Ireland?

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