

## Access to Maternity Services at St George's Healthcare

### Q&A

#### Why is access to St George's Hospital maternity unit being restricted?

- St George's Hospital has a very popular maternity unit and 5,300 babies were delivered at the unit last year (2010/11). When the unit was opened, it was designed on the basis of handling 3,000 deliveries per year.
- The hospital also provides a tertiary service for high risk women in South West London. (Approximately 25 women per month).
- To ensure that St George's can maintain a **safe** maternity service the number of deliveries the unit can handle is being capped at 5,128 per year.
- It is important for women to understand that this is the maximum number of deliveries that the unit can **safely** handle. It is not possible to increase capacity at the unit to increase this number.
- We have reviewed the number of births that took place at St George's in 2010/11, in light of the necessary restriction of 5,128 births this year. The estimate is that up to 200 women might be affected by this decision (4% of referrals).

#### What referrals will be accepted by St George's maternity unit?

- St George's Hospital working closely with local GPs, wants to make sure local women and those who are at a high risk of complications during pregnancy are prioritised. This means that women living closest to St George's and women who are at risk of complications during birth will be able to have their babies at St George's.
- From 8 August, St George's will accept women who live in the following postcode areas:

**SW2**  
**SW4**  
**SW8**  
**SW11**

**SW12**  
**SW15**  
**SW16**  
**SW17**

**SW18**  
**SW19**  
**SW20**

**CR4**  
**SM4**

#### Referrals will also be accepted for:

- Late transfers of maternity care from other hospitals, if there is a clinical indication or where the woman has moved in to one of the postcode areas above and is not already booked with an alternative, local provider.

- High risk or complex referrals– (estimated to be around 25 women per month).
- In extenuating circumstances, St George's will consider referrals for non-complex women outside of the catchment area **if** they have delivered at SGH previously. However, acceptance of the referral will take place on an individual basis with the safety of the service, in terms of numbers of referrals already accepted, taking priority.
- There will be a review after three months of implementation to assess the effectiveness of the cap.

#### **What referrals will not be accepted?**

- Women with low risk pregnancies living outside area defined above. This means that women who live close to other local maternity units with capacity will be asked to go there, for example Croydon University Hospital or St Helier Hospital
- There will be a joint review after three months of implementation to assess the effectiveness of the cap.

#### **How have you determined which postcodes to include?**

- GPs, Commissioners and St George's have jointly reviewed the number of births that took place at the hospital in 2010/11 and identified which postcodes the women were from
- Postcodes with the greatest flows of women into St George's were prioritised.
- Women who live close to other local maternity units with capacity, for example, Croydon University Hospital or St Helier Hospital will be asked to go to the hospital nearest them.

#### **What happens if demand continues to grow?**

- The SWL Acute Commissioning Unit will lead a joint review with the Local Medical Committee (LMC) and local GPs after three months of implementation to assess the effectiveness of the cap.
- As part of the clinically led review of services *Better Services Better Value*, a group of doctors, midwives and other healthcare professionals are looking at how maternity and newborn care services are provided across South West London. This review includes looking at projections for the rise in birth rate in South West London and how best these needs can be met within the area. In the review, doctors and midwives from across South West London will be talking to local patients, stakeholders and members of the public about improving services and getting better value across South West London so that we can make sure we develop and improve services for patients in the long term. *Better Services*

*Better Value* will report back on the findings of the review in Autumn 2011. We will keep local people engaged and informed.

**Have local GPs been involved in this decision?**

- Yes, local GPs are part of the Clinical Quality Review Group at St George's and have been closely involved in applying the most equitable approach to this decision.

**Women who want to have their babies at St George's are going to be very disappointed if we are unable to refer them.**

- We apologise to those women for whom this will be the case. This arrangement has been discussed length with our local GP leads and St George's. This was considered the most equitable option to maintain the safety of St George's maternity service.
- All groups and organisations concerned are very sorry that restrictions will have to be applied. Our priority is to ensure the safety of mothers and their babies locally, this includes those attending St George's.
- The NHS has a duty to provide safe services that comply with national guidance.

(Please see note below relating to "choice").

**What if women refuse to go to other maternity services closer to home?**

- Women should speak to their GPs who will be able to explain the options available to them.

**Is this likely to happen at other hospitals?**

- All maternity units have a maximum number of deliveries that they can handle safely. It is not unusual for a hospital to restrict access to maternity services to allow their local population guaranteed access.

**Note: Choice in maternity services**

The NHS constitution explains what our rights are to choose care, and the relevant section can be found on page 51. You can find information on the NHS Choices website ([Your right to choice in the NHS](#)).

However, maternity services have a different emphasis. Choice of provider for maternity care is extended to all of England under "Maternity Matters", but only where the hospital can meet local needs and have increased capacity to provide maternity services from outside the area . Unfortunately this is not yet the case at St George's.