

29 October 2021

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Re: Official Information Act (OIA) request – Transfer of babies/expectant mothers

I refer to your Official Information Act request dated 6 October 2021 requesting the following information regarding the impact of recent COVID cases in NICUs:

- How many NICU babies have been transferred out of Auckland and North Shore hospitals after the positive Covid cases in recent days.
- Where they have been transferred to, ie specific hospitals
- Whether the units have been cleared. If so, whether they are still empty
- How many expectant mothers who may have needed care in either of NICUs have been transferred or told they will need care in another hospital. And where they have been/will be transferred to.

Response:

We can only speak to Auckland NICU, not North Shore Hospital.

As a result of the COVID exposure event in its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), Auckland DHB/Starship put in place additional testing and screening of parents and staff and a higher level of PPE than standard. These measures were to remain in place for two weeks. The unit was not cleared as it was required to provide on-going care for the babies that were there and for new cases. New babies were admitted when required and NICU still ran at approximately 80% occupancy.

It is NICU standard practice to transfer babies out when they no longer need the level of care provided in NICU. Thirteen babies were transferred either home, to another ward in Auckland DHB/Starship or to other DHBs closer to home. All of these babies were transferred as they did not require NICU level care. No babies were transferred out as a result of the COVID exposure event.

As some staff were required to self-isolate for varying periods, the number of admissions was reduced by transferring out a small number of pregnant mothers. Six pregnant mothers were transferred from Auckland DHB to other DHBs.

There were several pregnant mothers needing care in a hospital with a level 3 NICU neonate who would normally have come to Auckland DHB but who were instead transferred to other DHBs. We

do not hold this information; you would need to request from other DHBs, for example Waitemata DHB for the North Shore unit, to confirm exact numbers.

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.parliament.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