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31/01/2024

Deputy Toibin
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 1532/24: To ask the Minister for Health the number of babies born with addiction to drugs or alcohol, in each of the past ten years.

Dear Deputy Toibin.

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Information on children born addicted to or severely affected by alcohol is not easily available, as the impact on children, particular in relation to alcohol use, ranges across a spectrum, with no reliable clinical test or screening test available for more mild and subtle cases.

The best available evidence estimates that about 600 Irish babies are born each year with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, with a further 9-10 times this number of babies born annually in Ireland who have other Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The majority of these children will have no visible signs of disability at birth and difficulties may not manifest until preschool or school age. As there is no register of persons with neurodevelopmental disorder in Ireland, no up to date data are available on cases of FASD in Ireland.

In responding to your query, data has been derived from the HSE's HIPE Data collection system, which records the discharge data per episode of care. Patients may be admitted to hospital more than once in any given time period with the same or different diagnosis i.e. the data is not patient specific. HIPE collects day patient and in-patient activity.

With this in mind, the table over page provides data in relation to the number of new born discharges, aged 0 – 3 weeks, in the period 2011 to 2020 recorded with a discharge diagnosis of being affected by maternal use of alcohol, or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or affected by maternal use of drugs of addiction or withdrawal symptoms from maternal use of drugs of addiction. However, these numbers significantly underestimate the number of children affected by alcohol during pregnancy.

Unfortunately data beyond 2020 is currently not available due to the current work to rule.

Year	National Figure
2011	146
2012	136
2013	136
2014	130
2015	101
2016	110
2017	93
2018	99
2019	96
2020	102

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme