

Identity & Passport Service

Deputy Registrar General
Smedley Hydro
Trafalgar Road
Southport
PR8 2HH

Tel +44 (0)1704 553314
Fax +44 (0)151 471 4566
Web www.ips.gov.uk

Mr Nick Leaton
Email : request-29366-82010895@whatdotheyknow.com

Reference: FOICR 14091/10

Date: 29 March 2010

Dear Mr Leaton

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your e-mail of 19 February in which you ask for information on the General Register Office's (GRO) birth registration process. Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

From 1 April 2008, the GRO became part of the Identity and Passport Service (IPS). You asked for the following information:-

- 1. All internal documents, emails and policies relating to the provision of NHS numbers.**
- 2. Database schemas used to record information relating to births**
- 3. Any documents relating to the flow of information too and from the IPS and registrars relating to births**

Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act, the Home Office is not obliged to comply with an information request where it would cost more than £600 to do so. The £600 limit applies to all central government departments and is based on work being carried out at a rate of £25 per hour, which equates to 3½ days work per request. The cost of locating and retrieving information and preparing the response can be included in the costs for these purposes. The costs do not include considering whether any information is exempt from disclosure, overheads such as heating or lighting, or items such as photocopying or postage.

We hold the information which you have requested, but we have estimated that the cost of answering your request would exceed the £600 limit. We are therefore unable to comply with it. However, we have some information in the attached Annex which we hope will be of some help to you.



If you refine your request, so that it is more likely to fall under the cost limit, we will consider it further. I should mention that if you simply break your request down into a series of similar smaller requests, we might still decline to answer it if the total cost exceeds £600.

You also asked:-

4. Internal manuals and/or guidelines for the process for a registrar to register a birth

Please see the attached Annex which includes an extract from the relevant guidance contained in the Births and Deaths Registration Handbook.

You further asked:-

5. The number of refusals to register a birth because of the lack of an NHS number.

In response, we do not hold the information you request. We do not know how many birth registrations are refused by registrars due to the lack of a notification as, although they will occasionally contact us for advice in these circumstances, they are not reported to us routinely. However, you will see that our guidance to registrars (attached - in para 24) indicates that where a notification of a birth (and thus of an NHS number) has not been received, local enquiries should be made. It is important that the registrar makes every effort to establish that the birth is one which he / she can register, but the lack of an NHS number in itself is not grounds for refusal to register.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to the address below, quoting reference FOICR 14091/10.

Information Access Team
Home Office
Ground Floor, Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
e-mail: info.access@homeoffice.si.gov.uk

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. Should you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

David Buckley
Deputy Registrar General and Executive Director, General Register Office

The process for the provision of NHS numbers is that they are allocated by the health service and used, amongst other things, for the linkage of patient information. Registrars are notified of births by the health service and these notifications include the child's NHS number. The reason why registrars may ask for a NHS number before registering a birth is that it helps to find the correct notification for the particular child quickly in order to check that the birth has taken place. It is important that registrars make these checks in order to avoid false birth registrations. Where a birth is registered very quickly (eg within 24 hours) after it takes place the notification may not have been received by the registrar (ie within the computerised registration system) and so the registrar may need to confirm in some other way that the birth has occurred but, as you point out, there is no statutory requirement for the NHS number to be produced before registration.

For statistical purposes, registrars will link the notification received with the birth record either at the time of the registration if the notification is available then or afterwards if it is not.

Below is an extract from our Handbook for Registration Officers:

Birth notifications

20. Any person attending a mother at the time of a birth in England is required, under section 269 of the National Health Service Act 2006, to notify the event to the Primary Care Trust for the place in which the birth took place. Any person in attendance for a birth in Wales is required under section 200 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 to notify the event to the Local Health Board. The Acts also provide for registrars to have access to the notifications. In practice, these are provided via RON.

21. Paragraph deleted.

22. The notifications should be used:

- (a) to check that the birth was in the sub-district;**
- (b) to ensure that every birth in the sub-district is registered promptly, even where the child has since died;**
- (c) to check that no birth is registered more than once;**
- (d) to ensure that an informant does not try to make a false registration of, for example, a child not born to parents claiming it as theirs, or, a non-existent child; and**
- (e) to link with the relevant birth registration in order to:**

(i) identify unregistered births from unlinked notifications in RON for requisition purposes, and

(ii) extract the NHS number and birth weight for statistical purposes.

23. In a unified sub-district it is important that the duties of the nominated officer (as laid down in the distribution of functions) with regard to pre-registration checks are carried out to prevent dual registration of events.

24. Where no notification is received for a birth which is registered, the registrar should make local enquiries with the hospital and health authority. If there is no health record of the birth, a report should be sent to the General Register Office (Corrections and Re-Registration Section), enclosing an occasional copy of the birth entry and the serial number of any certificates issued.

We hope this clarifies the issue you have raised in your enquiry. It includes the relevant guidance and instruction from GRO to the registration service in relation to NHS numbers and registration. You will appreciate that the General Register Office does hold considerable documentation relating to the flow of information on births between GRO and the registration service, and also in relation to NHS numbers - if the attached information does not meet your requirements I would be grateful if you would refine your request to enable us to consider this further.