

New national maternity early warning system: frequently asked questions April 2019

Why has a national maternity early warning system (MEWS) been developed?

The health of pregnant women can deteriorate for many reasons. At times, the failure to recognise this and respond appropriately and quickly means her health may continue to get worse.

What does the MEWS do?

The maternity early warning system (MEWS) establishes a consistent process for recognising and responding to a pregnant or recently pregnant woman's deterioration across New Zealand, especially for women and clinicians who move between different hospitals and different district health boards (DHBs).

The MEWS was adapted from the national adult recognition and response system already implemented across New Zealand hospitals for non-pregnant adult patients.

What does the MEWS include?

The MEWS includes a nationally consistent maternity vital signs chart that reflects the different physiology of a woman's body during pregnancy.

This chart includes a calculated early warning score for early recognition of, and quick and effective response to, deterioration. The MEWS also contains tools and guidance to help DHBs implement the system.

Who developed the MEWS?

The national MEWS was developed by the Health Quality & Safety Commission and the Maternal Morbidity Working Group, with input from DHBs and relevant professional colleges.

It is supported by the New Zealand College of Midwives, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

Where is the MEWS being used?

The national MEWS was tested in three early implementation sites, two replacing their current local maternity early warning systems, between May and October 2018:

- Nelson Marlborough Health implemented the MEWS across all inpatient areas in their hospitals and facilities.
- Auckland and Northland DHBs implemented the MEWS in their maternity services and will spread the system across their other inpatient areas during 2019.

From March 2019, the national MEWS is being rolled out to all New Zealand public hospitals. By 2020, all pregnant or recently pregnant woman admitted to hospital in Aotearoa New Zealand who require repeated observations, will be monitored using this system.

We anticipate that many DHBs will initially focus on improvements within their maternity services prior to spreading MEWS to other inpatient services.

More information

More information on the MEWS and wider patient deterioration programme is available here: <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/patient-deterioration>