

Home births should be discouraged says report

WELLINGTON, Feb. 2.

Home births should be discouraged in order to provide the best care for babies, according to a Department of Health report.

Releasing the report, the Minister of Health, Mr Malcolm said its authors, the Board of Health's Maternity Services Committee, maintained the best and safest place for delivery for both mother and baby was a properly equipped and staffed maternity unit.

"The time of greatest risk for babies, apart from early pregnancy when miscarriages are frequent, is around the time of birth," Mr Malcolm said. "As the risk is much greater for the baby than for the mother, the baby has a right to the best available care."

While opposing home births, the report, "The Mother and Baby — the Early Days", contained recommendations to reduce risk when they did take place.

The recommendations for

home birth were that the highest standard of care should be provided with optimum support from the nearby obstetric unit, the Minister said. The committee had considered in detail the conditions necessary for safe home delivery or early discharge and had reviewed the provisions for care by the midwife and the public health or Plunket nurse in the home.

"I will be looking closely at the recommendation that domiciliary midwives should be based at the obstetric unit of the area and that their contracts should be with the hospital board, rather than with the Minister through the Department of Health as at present," Mr Malcolm said.

The committee also believed that contracts should only be available to registered midwives with recent experience in a modern obstetric unit, Mr Malcolm said.

General practitioners attending home births should also have adequate qualifica-

tions in obstetrics, and should apply strict criteria to the selection of patients suitable for home delivery, the report said.

In 1979 only 0.6 per cent of births in New Zealand were known to have occurred at home . . . 289 of a total of 52,279 births. That figure did not include home births occurring where the birth was conducted without professional assistance.

Under the Nurses Act 1977 it is illegal for anyone other than a midwife or a registered nurse to provide nursing services to anyone during pregnancy or birth and the nurses must have the overall supervision of a doctor.

"Some births are conducted without any professional supervision at all," the report said. "One of the submissions made to us by a husband described how he delivered his own wife without professional assistance."

"We are not suggesting that the Department of Health should actively hunt out and

prosecute those fathers, friends and others who may be illegally conducting confinements. But we do emphasise that the reason Parliament has seen fit to include this section in the Nurses Act is that the unborn baby has rights as well as the mother and the father, and society should ensure that adequate is provided for the baby."

Mr Malcolm said he was pleased to note the importance placed on breast feeding in the report. "Hospital staff are encouraged to promote breast feeding and to provide conditions for demand feeding and where necessary practical help."

The New Zealand Medical Association said the report underlined its assertion that the safest place for deliveries was in a properly-equipped maternity unit which was able to cope with any problem that might arise.

The association was studying the report, it said. —NZPA.

We're putting the time in