

21st December 2020

Deputy Holly Cairns
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 41060/20 To ask the Minister for Health the way testing for Covid-19 is being carried out in meat processing plants; the number of tests carried out; the number of plants in which tests have been conducted between 1 August and 30 November 2020; the procedures for when a person is found to have Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 42099/20 /20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the status of Covid-19 testing in meat processing plants; the procedures for when a person is found to have Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Cairns,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

Following the recommendation by NPHE the Serial Testing programme at meat and food processing plants commenced on 21st August and is based on testing of asymptomatic staff. Testing nationally is operating within the agreed schedule which is once every four-weeks, which is informed with guidance from HSE Public Health. We are testing approximately 80 meat and food processing facilities nationwide. Serial testing is now established as a core component of the overall testing and contact tracing service, helping to detect asymptomatic individuals who may otherwise go undetected. This testing in Meat and Food Production facilities nationally within the agreed criteria once every four weeks and has been taking place as scheduled.

Cycle 1 of the Serial Testing Programme in food production facilities commenced on 21st August and concluded on 9th October and carried out 30,287 tests with 128 of these tests being detected cases. This represents a detected rate of 0.42%. Cycle 2 commenced on 12th October for a four-week cycle with 17,742 tests being conducted with 99 detected cases being reported. This represents a detected rate of 0.56%. Cycle 3 commenced on 9th November and concluded on 4th December with 18,795 tests completed, reporting 129 detected cases at 0.69% positivity rate. The current Cycle 4 commenced on 7th December with 10,983 tests completed to date with 44 detected cases reported. The HSE is working closely with internal and external stakeholders to identify and implement improvements which can be built into the serial testing programme. This is unrelated to outbreak testing, it is serial testing of asymptomatic staff.

Where an outbreak occurs in a meat or food processing facility then outbreak mass testing will still occur. Public Health will be in touch locally in those situations. If a plant has confirmed cases there is a Public Health Assessment which determines what interventions are required and the subsequent frequency of testing. In all cases where an individual receives a detected result, the contact tracing process begins.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh O'Beirne

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National Lead Testing and Tracing