



21 December 2020

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 43845/20: To ask the Minister for Health if it is still his objective that children get a dental check-up at second class under the school dentistry programme.**

Dear Deputy Ó Laoghaire

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Dental Services for primary school going children are provided in line with the 1970 Health Act, subsequent Acts and regulation. Services are organised and delivered by the HSE's Dental Service in line with Department of Health policy. Access to emergency treatment for the relief of pain and sepsis is through local dental clinics. Routine dental services for primary school going children are delivered through a targeted approach with a strong emphasis on the prevention of oral disease. Referral for treatment in secondary care settings are also made from the HSE Dental Service.

The 1994 Dental Health Action Plan states that '*Children in specific classes, usually 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes are targeted for preventative measure under the school based approach*'. Children in the targeted age groups are typically seen in 1st/2nd Class (7-8 year olds) and 6th Class (11-13 year olds), with some 4th Class (10 year olds) children being seen in some parts of the country.

Access to dental services was restricted to urgent /emergency treatment under the terms of Statutory Instrument 121/2020 (28th March 2020 -18th May 2020). An emergency dental service was maintained in all HSE service areas throughout this time, which included remote consultation through telephone triage as well as clinical attendance for treatment.

During that time, and since, many HSE orthodontic staff have been redeployed to testing and tracing as part of the HSE's response to the pandemic.

Dental Services have gradually resumed. All service locations have implemented social distancing and other organisational measures as well as infection prevention and control guidance from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre that has been updated during the pandemic. HSE Dental staff members have been provided with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the pandemic.

In locations where dental services share waiting areas and other facilities, all services are working together to ensure that services are delivered safely and effectively. As part of their resumption plan, each dental and orthodontic area has restarted their screening and treatment service for children. Clinicians have reviewed the records of patients that were under treatment at the time when services were phased down.

Priority for early appointments has been given to patients that need to be seen urgently, and following up where necessary on cases that had emergency treatment during the restricted access period.

The National Oral Health Office has issued the following guidance in relation to the prioritisation of patient groups in the school screening programme:

Schools programme:

- a) Completion of treatment plans already commenced, examinations that had been scheduled.
- b) Recalls: review records of patients who are due to be recalled, using a treatment risk assessment based on the specific needs of each patient versus the impact of deferral of the review or operative care.
- c) Review the 2019 /2020, 2020/ 2021 year schools lists and prioritise as follows or as resources permit:
  - 6th Class
  - 1st Class / 2nd Class
  - 4th Class

Full assessment of the impact on waiting lists of the restricted access period, reduced throughput on resumption, and the ongoing commitment to testing on the backlog in service provision is being undertaken. Reducing waiting times is a key priority for the HSE, while at all times ensuring that services implement the organisational and preventive measures required to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



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**Joseph Green**  
**AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations**