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**PQ Ref 18947/20**

**To ask the Minister for Health his views on reports that data collection on suicide for hospitals here were suspended due to the Covid-19 lockdown; the reason for same; when such data collection will recommence; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

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Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to your question above.

This question likely refers to a recent Irish Times article (*Ireland facing a 'tsunami' of mental health problems*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020) which incorrectly stated that “data collection on suicides by Irish hospitals were suspended as a result of the lockdown”. It should be noted that in Ireland, the decision as to whether someone has died by suicide, is a legal decision made by Coroners, not a medical determination made by doctors or the HSE. Following the Coronial investigation, inquest and registration processes, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) publishes national mortality data, including on deaths by suicide. All such CSO data is publically available on their website, [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).

Nevertheless, the **National Self-Harm Registry Ireland (NSHRI)**, operated by the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF), does collect data related to self-harm presentations to hospital emergency departments in the Republic of Ireland. They have provided the following information outlining the impact of Covid-19 on data collection.

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Inclusion criteria for the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland include presentations as a result of self-harm and suicide attempts, but not deaths by suicide. Data are collected by independently trained data registration officers (DROs).

As a result of government-imposed restrictions related to Covid-19, data collection for the NSHRI was suspended in all but seven hospitals during the period 27 March to 29 June 2020. This was in line with the following:

- On 27 March 2020, the Government announced that “If [an employee is] not engaged in the provision of essential services, then [they are] not permitted to travel to and from work until 12 April 2020”. The ‘stay-at-home’ order was extended beyond 12 April 2020 until 18 May 2020. DROs are not engaged in the provision of essential services, therefore did not travel to and from work during this timeframe.
- On 18 May 2020, Phase 1 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business began. The stay at home order continued for those whose workplace remained closed and for individuals who could work from home. As there were restrictions with regard to access to many hospitals for non-hospital employees, DROs were instructed to continue to work from home during Phase 1.
- On 8 June 2020, Phase 2 Reopening began. Individuals were instructed that they must continue to work from home wherever possible. DROs were instructed to continue to work from home during this phase until Return to Work Safely Protocols were prepared by the organisation and in place for planned return to work in Phase 3.

DROs continued to work from home until Phase 3 of easing restrictions came into effect on 29 June 2020 when Return to Work Safely Protocols were introduced. Since the introduction of Return to Work Safely Protocols were introduced on 29 June, many DROs have returned to hospitals to resume data collection. Prior to DROs accessing hospitals, the NSRF, as the employer, requires each DRO to:

- complete appropriate training for the safe return to work during COVID-19 restrictions
- review a Return to work protocol developed specifically for DROs
- complete and sign a Pre-return to work form
- be equipped with personal protective equipment before entering hospitals

As of 31 July 2020, of the 36 emergency departments where data is collected for the NSHRI, data collection has now resumed at 25 of these locations. It is anticipated that data collection will have resumed at all hospitals by 31 August 2020.

The NSRF is in receipt of funding from the NOSP for the NSHRI, and other research projects in suicide, self-harm and mental health - contributing to surveillance, research, implementation, evaluation and the evidence base for strategic goals and actions of Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020.

I trust this information is useful for you. Please do revert should you require anything further.

Yours sincerely,



Mr John Meehan

HSE Assistant National Director, Mental Health Strategy and Planning  
Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)