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10th July 2020

Deputy Gary Gannon
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

E: gary.gannon@oireachtas.ie

CC pquestions@hse.ie

Re: PQ Number 12637/20

Question: To ask the Minister for Health to ask the Minister for Health if he will extend Covid-19 testing to all community-based health officials, community care workers and their clients and each user of primary care centre facilities

Dear Deputy Gannon,

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

Recommendations in relation to what cohort of people should be tested rests with NPHEP guided by the Health Protection HPSC / Public Health and as advocated by the WHO and ECDC.

The current testing strategy focuses on testing those who meet the case definition for COVID-19 and close contacts of confirmed cases. There is no stated requirement to test community healthcare staff or service users, outside of staff working in residential care facilities for older people. However, at all times, staff and members of the public are advised to consult their GP if they are presenting with symptoms which give rise to concerns about COVID-19.


Where outbreaks of COVID-19 occur in the community, a targeted testing approach will be required by Public Health as part of the investigation and control of the outbreak and will be defined by Public Health. Where cases of COVID-19 occur in a setting where vulnerable populations are cared for/reside or where vulnerable workers are employed, testing will be based on Public Health risk assessment. This includes both acute and community-based settings, and workplaces, e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, residential care facilities (RCF), home care settings, direct provision centres, facilities for the homeless or Irish Traveller community settings. Public Health will maintain a high index of suspicion and a low threshold for testing.

Much consideration has been given to the testing strategy for health care workers (HCWs). All symptomatic HCWs will be tested for SARS-CoV-2 if they fit the case definition for COVID-19. Asymptomatic HCWs will also be tested under certain circumstances, e.g. in the context of an outbreak in an acute (hospital) setting, all HCWs in the affected ward/unit/setting will be tested for SARS-CoV-2.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) has requested that the Health Service Executive implements a programme to perform weekly PCR/RNA testing for COVID-19 of all staff in Residential Care Facilities for Older Persons over a four-week period. This activity began the week commencing Monday June 22nd with tests being performed at each nursing home in the country once per week for four weeks.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorraine Doherty". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Dr Lorraine Doherty,
National Clinical Director for Health Protection, HSE, Health Protection Surveillance Centre**