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Deputy Denise Mitchell,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 9415/20 - To ask the Minister for Health if guidelines have been given to carers that call to persons' homes in regard to Covid-19 infections at the home

-Denise Mitchell

Dear Deputy Mitchell,

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

Home Support Services play an important role in providing personal care to people in their own homes and support to carers. Home Support services for older people are provided either by directly employed staff or by voluntary and private providers who have formal tender arrangements with the HSE to deliver the services. The type of support provided includes personal care and, where appropriate, essential household duties relating to the client's assessed needs.

The spread of COVID-19 is posing significant challenges for many areas of our Older People Services, including Home Support Services. In light of these unprecedented challenges together with the Government's guidance on social distancing and their initiative on 'Cocooning' those aged over 70 and other vulnerable groups, the HSE has had to reassess its operation of Home Support Services nationally, to ensure that the assessed needs of those client's with the highest priority are met.

Guidance has been provided to healthcare staff at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/> and <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>. Staff and Approved Providers are asked to keep themselves updated by regularly checking the HPSC as guidance documents may be frequently updated.

In the event that home support staff become aware of a suspect or positive case of COVID-19 in a client in receipt of home support services or a family member's resident in the same premises, they are advised to contact their respective line manager for guidance and support. It is important that both clients and staff are protected from the spread of COVID-19 and in that regard, enhanced PPE is now being provided to an expanded range of settings,

including to support the care of people in their own homes. Every effort it made to ensure appropriate PPE is available to ensure continued provision of home support service, especially to those clients with higher priority needs. The HSE in conjunction with the Private/Voluntary providers of Home Support, where applicable, will endeavour to continue to provide the service throughout this period, where possible, with priority to be given to those most vulnerable in the community.

As well as Home Services Prior to the public health emergency with regard to COVID-19, the HSE was committed to protecting the level of Personal Assistant (PA) and Home Support Services available to persons with disabilities. In the 2020 National Service Plan, the HSE's priority was continue to deliver high quality PA and Home Support to approximately 10,000 people with disabilities including 1.67 million PA hours and 3.08 million Home Support hours.

In preparing for and responding to COVID-19 and to fully align with Public Health guidance as recommended via the NPHET, the HSE and its partner service providers put in place a range of measures, which included the prioritisation of vital residential and home support services whilst curtailing or closing certain services such as day services, as well as certain clinical supports in order to; a) prioritise essential public health services at CHO level and b) ensure continued delivery of the referenced residential and home supports provision. I should note that in the absence of regular access to some service and supports, CHOs and service providers have tried to maintain services that can be delivered safely; providing outreach and telecare solutions, using technology where possible; and using creative and innovative models of care to support service users, both adults and children.

Under the governance of the HSE's National Integrated Operations Hub chaired by the COO and work relating to vulnerable people, Disability Operations has a team in place with the responsibility for providing supports and capacity building training for the sector. To date, a range of guidance material has been developed to support people with disabilities, families and staff including:

- Alternative Models of Care (Non-Residential)
- Streamlined Health Passport for people with disabilities who are admitted to hospital
- Coronavirus (Covid-19) Frequently Asked Questions for people with disabilities and family carers
- Guidance for supporting children in a community residence/at home
- Support coordination in a pandemic; practical checklist to avoid stressors for service users

The FAQ, in particular, explains the pathway for supports for carers and includes dedicated guidance and advice on a range of issues relating to COVID-19 together with a list of local and national helpline numbers.

For the full list of Guidance/Advice documentation, see the below web link which is the central repository for disability specific guidance material during the COVID-19 emergency.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

In addition, carers are also advised to keep an eye on the following weblinks for guidance and advisory links (including in terms of social care/ clinical matters) relating to COVID-19, as well as the Inclusion Ireland and Family Carers Ireland websites and helplines.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/primarycareguidance/adviseriskassessmentandmanagementofpatients/>

Processes are underway in order to plan for the reintroduction of non-Covid services. In that regard the HSE has now developed a number of important guidance documents to assist disability services. These are as follows:

1. Framework for Resumption of Adult Day Services;
2. Reshaping Disability Services From 2020 & Beyond

These are now also available on the website referenced above:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

It is important to note that the above guidance is interim and subject to change in line with the overall management of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with contemporary Public Health Guidance;

CHOs and S38/39 agencies continue to work together at a regional level in order to plan and co-ordinate efforts.

The HSE continues to plan the re-establishment of vital non-covid supports and services. This includes very careful and detailed work on the part of the Disability Sector with national guidance and will result in directing how all funded agencies can deliver services on a medium to long-term basis. Plans have to comply with guidance as set out by the National Public Health Emergency Team as well as Public Health specialists in the HSE.


Additionally, in respect of Childrens Disability Services, a national implementation group is being established to support the reform of these services as envisaged in PDS1 and through the establishment of 'Networks' (CDNs) by year end. This remains a key a priority commitment for the HSE and its Lead Agency Partners.

Furthermore, the Disability Sector is re-establishing a number of structures including the National Consultative Forum as well as other operational structures that will co-ordinate and support the sector as we continue to navigate this pandemic and make every effort to deliver supports and services in line with Public Health Guidance.

The HSE acknowledges the valuable role of carers, home support workers and providers across the services in supporting older people and their care groups throughout this difficult period.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



David Walsh,
National Director,
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