



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

9th June 2020

PQ Number: 6390/20

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the domestic laboratory capacity available for Covid-19; the profile of capacity versus use since 20 April 2020 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Catherine Murphy

Request Type: Direct Written Response to Catherine.Murphy@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Murphy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) set the testing framework for the HSE. The HSE is then responsible for ensuring the delivery of the required testing model and capacity. The target set by NPHE was to have in the region of 100,000 PCR testing capacity per week by early May to assist Ireland in moving through the phases of response to the pandemic.

The HSE has developed the existing testing infrastructure, taking unprecedented measures to build a robust end-to-end process with multiple pathways at great pace. The current model is based primarily on GP referral, community sampling centres staffed by temporarily reallocated HSE staff, laboratory contracts and a contract tracing model based on using third level colleges and civil service departments.

The HSE utilises 48 laboratories to deliver this capacity including National Virus Reference Laboratories, public hospital laboratories, private hospital laboratories and commercial laboratories. These all form part of a national laboratory COVID19 testing network. Clearly to secure this capacity and ensure it operates in a cohesive manner has been very challenging. It is in place and we are constantly working on improving the operation and performance, as seen by the improvement in testing turnaround times.

See below a week-by-week breakdown which includes community and acute testing.

| Week Ending | Available Capacity | Total Tests Reported |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 25-Apr | 60460 | 34641 |
| 02-May | 72490 | 57005 |
| 09-May | 99790 | 48617 |
| 16-May | 105930 | 40702 |
| 23-May | 106010 | 30365 |
| 30-May | 106050 | 25539 |
| 06-Jun | 106050 | 18867 |

Note in some cases testing capacity can be stood up or down with appropriate notice so the available capacity can fluctuate.

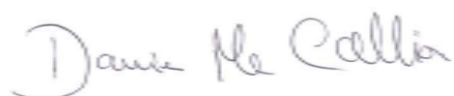
The laboratories have to meet a number of testing demands including:

- Acute hospital In-patient testing
- Health care worker testing
- Targeted public health testing initiatives; such as those in Residential Care Facilities
- Population testing

Demand has eased over recent weeks as societal measures have thankfully had a positive impact. We anticipate increased demand for testing in acute hospitals as services are restored and acute hospital testing protocols are implemented. This means the laboratories are not currently fully utilised at this time. A core focus of the national response to the pandemic is to ensure we retain capacity in the event of a second surge of the virus and to support targeted public health initiatives.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Damien McCallion
National Director, HSE