



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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10TH. June 2020

Deputy Brid Smith
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
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PQ Number 8197/20: To ask the Minister for Health the interventions made by his Department and the HSE in meat processing plants in relation to the Covid-19 outbreak; and the inspections undertaken by public health bodies in these plants.

Dear Deputy Smith,

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

A national outbreak control team has been convened to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in meat processing facilities across the country. This is a multi-agency group with representation from HSE Public Health, Environmental Health, HPSC, Occupational Health, Health and Safety authority, FSAI, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The team supports and is supported by the members of the regional outbreak control teams that work with each facility where an outbreak has occurred. The objectives of the national and all the local teams are to protect the health of the employees and the health of the wider community.

The national team has issued interim guidance to all meat processing plants in Ireland on the 15th of May with recommendations around infection prevention and control measures to prevent cases and control outbreaks; steps to be taken when an individual case is suspected or confirmed; and additional steps to be taken when an outbreak has occurred.

The local outbreak control teams have been working with the employers and employees of affected facilities to control and reduce the spread of infection. These teams are led by HSE Public Health departments and are also multi-agency, with representatives from environmental health, occupational health, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and have had good engagement from and co-operation with plant management in responding to outbreaks. The local outbreak control teams have arranged for the testing of symptomatic workers and the identification, tracing, and testing of contacts.

Plant management in each facility has been responsive and have implemented control measures to reduce the risk of transmission. The employees of affected facilities have co-operated with the advice of the outbreak control teams. Control measures that been introduced include: entry screening, physical distancing, increased use of PPE, provision of hand hygiene facilities, the setting up of additional space for canteen facilities to allow social distancing at break and lunch times, the installation of Perspex screens in work areas where 2m physical distancing cannot be maintained, the displaying of information about COVID-19 in a variety of languages, increased frequency of cleaning within plants, the rostering of workers into pods to limit transmission in the event of a worker becoming infected, and individual level behaviours such as avoiding coming to work when unwell, cough etiquette, and hand hygiene.

Ten facilities have been visited by members of the local OCT though formal inspections are the remit of the Health and Safety authority. The national outbreak control team is liaising with the Health and Safety Authority for their inspections, in collaboration with representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Kelleher', with a horizontal line underneath.

DR. KEVIN KELLEHER, FFPHM, FFPHMI
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