



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
31-33 Sráid Chaitríona, Luimneach.

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Suíomh Gréasáin/Website: <http://www.hse.ie>

13<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore,  
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Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Whitmore,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

**PQ: 32514/20**

*To ask the Minister for Health if play therapy is classed as an essential service; if so, the guidelines in place for the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

Children's Disability Services were stepped down in March 2020 in line with government recommendations to minimise spread of COVID-19. Through the pandemic, services continued to be provided on the phone/online and also, face to face for some children and families with high prioritised needs, taking all of the required infection prevention and control (IPC) precautions and in line with HSE's Alternative Models of Support (Non-Residential)(March 31st). Some services continued with staff, including therapists working with children with disabilities and their families remotely and using technology in new and effective ways.

On July 31st, the HSE issued the Guidance to Support Resumption of Children's Disability Services:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/guidance-to-support-resumption-of-children-disability-services.pdf>

This guidance applies to all Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) and those services planning reconfiguration into CDNTs. The Guidance clearly maps the pathway of access to services and supports, commencing with on phone/online supports, and where that does not meet the needs of the child and/or their family, moving to face to face interventions and what is required to do so safely.

The HSE's Chief Clinical Officer also issued Interim Guidance on Conducting Assessments in Disability Services. This document which was circulated in July 2020 applies to both children's and adult services.

**Resilience & Recovery Framework**

In the context of the Government's Resilience & Recovery Framework (2020 – 2021), the HSE has no role in defining what constitutes an essential service under the Government's regulations /restrictions.

Bearing in mind that each situation and each child's needs requirements are unique, the situation must be considered with reference to the following link which may provide clarification:



<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2dc71-level-5/#exercise-and-sporting-events>

The HSE regards the provision of disability services including services for children with disabilities as essential to maintaining a response to people with a disability.

All disability services must follow public health guidance in this area, including the prevention and management of covid related infection. The HSE and its funded disability partners will continue to provide residential, including respite, and day services in line with public health guidance and direction and having regard to the availability of staffing resources.

This must be supported by way of assurance and oversight from the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer along with the NPHT, so that we can do so in a safe manner. This means that childrens services, whilst being delivered in new ways, will gradually be re-introduced to children with disabilities.

Reference is drawn to the following HSE weblink which provides updates and guidance for disability service providers, including 'service resumption planning guidance'.

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

Attention is also drawn to the following important web links which provides up to date information resources in respect of covid: [www.hspsc.ie](http://www.hspsc.ie)

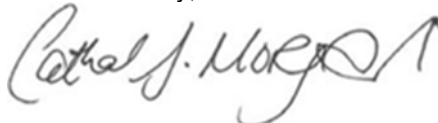
<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The HSE and disability service providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for people and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to restore services and ensure continuity of services in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies.

In this context, we welcome the recent announcements from the Government of additional funding for Disability Services:

- An additional €100 million secured for Disability Services in the recent budget.
- €10 million is being made available to support the resumption of day services and enhanced home support services for disability service users. The €10 million funding is being drawn down from the National Action Plan on COVID-19 - €7.5 million will increase the level of day service provision and €2.5 million will provide intensive support packages for children and young people with complex/high support needs.
- €20 million in one-off grants will be provided to reform disability services, build the capacity of disability organisations and to improve the quality of life of those who rely on these services.
- €7.8 million has been allocated by Sláintecare to facilitate the HSE and its funded service providers to address the overdue Assessments of Need.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,**  
**Head of Operations - Disability Services,**  
**Community Operations**