



17<sup>th</sup> November, 2020

Deputy Joan Collins, TD  
Dáil Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ: 33334/20**

**To ask the Minister for Health the public health measures being put in place to ensure the isolation of the Covid-19 infection within the Travelling community which has increased over the past four weeks.**

Dear Deputy Collins,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE is working on a range of measures in place for the Traveller community to combat COVID-19.

Priority testing for people in the Traveller community is being provided by GPs. Additionally Public Health (PH) are arranging enhanced mass testing in locations/halting sites with outbreaks via Safetynet, SwiftQueue referrals and the National Ambulance Service.

A National Traveller Outbreak Control Team was convened on 6<sup>th</sup> October by HSE National Public Health with representatives from HSE Public Health, HSE Social Inclusion, Pavee Point, Dept of Housing, Local Authority Housing, Safetynet and other NGOs. This team meets regularly to try and address the ongoing challenges, ensure an appropriate response and reduce the level of transmission. The National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO)/Public Health have developed specific communication tools and campaigns, targeted at, and tailored to Travellers and are engaging with all Traveller Projects via the Traveller Health Units (THUs) to ensure distribution through the most appropriate and relevant channels. The NSIO PH have recently produced a COVID information video series. These videos are being distributed via social media and WhatsApp direct to Travellers via our network of funded Traveller projects. Two further videos are planned in the coming weeks.

[Video 1](#) – Peer to Peer video about the measures Travellers can take to protect themselves, their families and community

[Video 2](#) – A message from Bishop Michael Router to the Traveller community

[Video 3](#) – Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald talks about the five things you can do if you test positive

[Video 4](#) – Martin Collins, Co-Director of Pavee Point speaks directly to Travellers about what they can do to protect each other.

[Video 5](#) - This video talks about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Traveller community and features Martin Collins, Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald and Bishop Michael Router.



The HSE together with the Dept of Housing, and the County and City Management Association has also developed a COVID-19 Preparedness Checklist (audit tool) to identify Traveller Halting Sites and Local Authority Traveller specific Group Housing Schemes that may need additional infection prevention and control, and identify specific support needed by local authorities or the HSE. A successful pilot of the scheme was conducted in Community Health Organisation (CHO) 1 and the scheme has now been rolled out nationally.

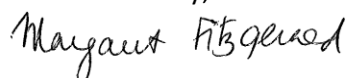
A bespoke Contact Tracing System has also been developed in the East Region, where we have seen an escalation of cases in recent months. This is a peer led system, integrated with local Traveller Health units and the national CRM system. In addition to the measures above:

- All CHO areas with National Social Inclusion prepared Traveller Support plans especially risk assessment, identification of medically vulnerable for support if infected and those extremely medically vulnerable for cocooning.
- HSE Social Inclusion/PH have been having regular teleconferences with THUs to develop guidance for Travellers
- A national helpline is available to Travellers  
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/traveller-helpline.html>
- Specific Traveller HPSC vulnerable group guidance (the guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 and dealing with cases of COVID-19) <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/vulnerablegroupsguidance/>
- Specific local supports have been put in place in various CHOs to support Travellers, for example, the [Community Assessment Hub in the Mater Hospital](#) is accessible to Travellers.
- A National COVID-19 Traveller Service User Experience survey was undertaken by the NSIO in September 2020, the [findings](#) will inform service planning throughout the ongoing pandemic.
- A website resource page with information and resources specifically for Travellers [Traveller COVID 19 sharing resources](#).

In the past 2- 3 weeks we have seen an overall decline in the number of COVID cases in the Travelling Community but we are vigilant in seeking more nuanced measures to contain the transmission especially when Phase 5 measures are changed. We are working with an Garda Siochana and also in the process of engaging with commercial interests regarding inappropriate use of marquees and on site catering for events linked to funerals or other reasons.

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

Yours sincerely,



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