

23rd November 2020

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 34388/20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an update to the Covid-19 tracker application in order that it can be paused; if he has concerns that this feature is being used for school staff during school hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy O'Callaghan,

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

I wish to apologise for the delay in issuing a response to your above question.

Due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and the numerous queries we have received to date it has taken longer than I would've liked to respond.

The latest release of the COVID Tracker App has a new feature which has been developed primarily for Healthcare Workers. The new feature allows Healthcare Workers to pause contact tracing for a period of time and sends a subsequent reminder to switch it back on. This feature was developed for instances where healthcare workers are wearing appropriate PPE, when providing care to patients, in order to stop them receiving a close contact alert for that contact. Workers can pause contact tracing at the start of their shift and select when they want to be reminded to switch contact tracing back on. Their phone will also send a notification to remind them to turn contact tracing back on.

The information provided in the App when a close contact alert is received has been updated to include guidance for people in schools and healthcare settings and now includes the date when the close contact happened. A Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) is carried out when a case of Covid-19 is notified in someone who has been to a primary or secondary school or childcare facility whilst infectious. If a staff member has been identified as a close contact through the HSE App, this information forms part of the PHRA, however the decision as to whether someone is defined as a 'close contact' is made through the PHRA. This is due to the fact that the PHRA is a full assessment and identifies many other aspects of potential disease transmission, which the App cannot, such as use of face coverings, infection prevention control measures or if the person was symptomatic.

Close contacts identified following this PHRA are notified to restrict their movements and are offered testing as per national contact guidelines (Day 0 and 7). They should look out for symptoms. Anyone informed through the App that they are a close contact, but are deemed not to be following a PHRA, will not have to restrict their movements or go for testing.

The HSE acknowledges the incredible effort made in all school communities throughout the

country to operate in a Covid-19 safe manner. The measures that are in place are robust, and the safety of staff and children is our paramount concern.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing