



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

24th November 2020

PQ: 34774/20

Question : To ask the Minister for Health the HSE's current understanding of the reliability of PCR testing for Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

-Jim O'Callaghan

Reply due: 24/11/2020

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.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) is a technique for amplifying DNA (and indirectly RNA). A thermostable (not damaged by heat) polymerase enzyme drives the PCR. This polymerase enzyme will synthesise/make a complementary sequence to any single strand of DNA if we provide the raw materials and the correct temperature for it to do so. There are three steps to PCR: denaturation; annealing; and extension.

The National Public Health emergency Team (NPHE) have identified PCR testing as the only valid diagnostic test for COVID-19 at this point. This is based on evidence available and is reviewed on a regular basis.

The European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) again recently confirmed PCT testing as the gold standard for diagnosis of COVID-19;

“To date, testing for SARS-CoV-2 infection mostly relies on reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) performed on a nasopharyngeal specimen. This testing method remains the gold standard for detecting SARS-CoV-2 and is characterised by both high sensitivity and specificity in detecting viral ribonucleic acid (RNA).”

The HSE continues to monitor the evidence for other testing types in conjunction with other public bodies, such as the Health and Information Quality Authority (HIQA).

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Damien McCallion".

Damien McCallion
National Director, HSE