

Deputy James Lawless TD  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

PQ 36896/20 To ask the Minister for Health the Covid-19 testing protocols for hospital medical staff; the average waiting times for hospital staff to receive their results after they have been tested; if the testing of hospital medical staff is undertaken exclusively in the hospitals they work in or by an outside agency; if in-house testing in the hospitals of medical staff is quicker than those conducted by an outside agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Lawless,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Response:

The testing and occupational health guidance for medical staff across the HSE is detailed on our HPSC website (see <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplace-health-and-wellbeing-unit/covid-19-guidance/>). All HSE services utilise these protocols in their COVID-19 testing approach amongst staff. This includes a range of guidance's related to both asymptomatic and healthcare workers returning to work following a detected COVID test. Additional contractors and other employees working in HSE facilities are covered in further guidance produced by the HPSC (<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/employersemployeesguidance/>).

The HSE has a network of testing and laboratory services that provide an integrated National COVID testing response. Laboratory capacity within this network is provided by a range of laboratories which include both hospital based, external (within Ireland) and additional off island testing capacity. All of these laboratories provide capacity as an integrated network of services.

Protocols for the testing of hospital medical staff in individual hospitals is based on locally managed services (in line with HPSC guidance). Hospital testing can comprise of the following approaches:

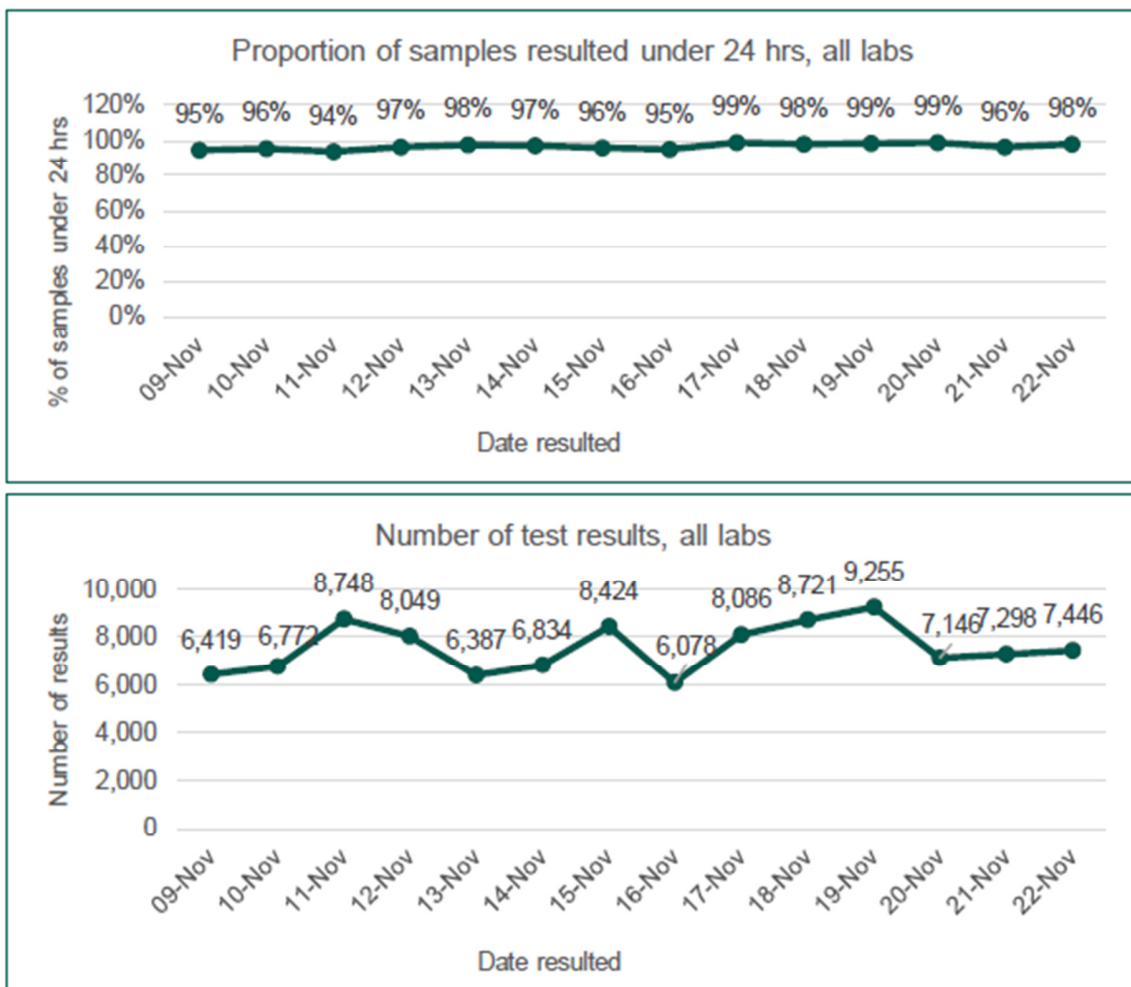
- Hospitals perform sampling swab with sample processed by hospital laboratory (as part of Hospital Group network laboratory system)
- Hospital performs sampling swab with sample processed by external laboratory (e.g. NVRL or NEFER)
- Hospital staff are referred to local community testing centre and sample is processed by hospital laboratory or external laboratory

Information on COVID testing results time is updated daily on the HSE website (see <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/integrated-information-service-testing-and-contact-tracing-dashboard.html>).



All laboratory services providing COVID tests are continuously monitored to ensure achievement of national targets. Performance measures including a range of indicators including volume of activity and turnaround times. Figure 1 below presents performance (for the last 2 weeks of available data) on turnaround times for all samples (internal and external) processed by laboratories. It should be noted performance on these indicators relates specifically to community based testing. However, such testing includes both the public and referred healthcare workers. For hospitals processing internally referred samples, the HSE has equivalent turnaround time targets. Information is not currently separated out specifically on turnaround times for healthcare workers referred.

Figure 1 shows compliance with turnaround times between 94-99%. From time to time, some laboratories may experience service interruptions but these difficulties tend to be short term. Service interruptions may be experienced for a variety of reasons including laboratory machine servicing / repair, hospital outbreaks requiring re-prioritisation of samples, etc. Performance monitoring of external referred samples (to both on and off island laboratories) shows compliance rates >98% for 12 of the past 14 days.





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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ciaran Browne". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Dr. Ciaran Browne  
Acute Hospitals Division