



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

24^h November 2020

PQ: 37051/20

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the number of cycles being used within the PCR tests in Irish testing laboratories; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

-Michael Fitzmaurice

Dear Deputy Fitzmaurice,

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

SARS-CoV-2 PCR assays in Ireland are operated in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions, and the CE marking for the assay. It is the manufacturer that decides the optimal number of cycles for the assay, not the testing laboratory.

Higher Cycle threshold values typically indicate a lower amount of virus in the sample. However, the CT value alone does not indicate whether the virus load is increasing or decreasing, it does not indicate whether the individual is infectious or not, and it does not provide an indication of the specimen quality (i.e. how closely the specimen mirrors what is actually happening in the patient's respiratory tract).

The number of PCR cycles used in Ireland is decided by the manufacturer of the assay, so there is no single answer. The HSE uses a wide range of assays. As a general rule, most assays run for 40-45 cycles.

Results are reported in line with manufacturer's recommendations, and knowledge in the laboratory of the relative sensitivity of their platform, and results are interpreted by the ordering clinician in the clinical context.

I hope 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