

27th 2020

Deputy Louise O'Reilly
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 29157/20 /20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the number of Covid-19 cases involved workers in food and meat processing since 14 September; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy O'Reilly,

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

The Serial Testing programme at meat and food processing plants commenced on 21st August and is based on testing of asymptomatic staff. As part of this Serial Testing programme we are testing approximately 80 meat and food processing facilities nationwide based on a four-week schedule, which is informed with guidance from HSE Public Health. Serial testing is now established as a core component of the overall testing and contact tracing service, helping to detect asymptomatic individuals who may otherwise go undetected.

Cycle 1 of the serial testing programme in Food Production facilities commenced on Friday 21st of August and concluded on Friday 9th of October. Cycle 1 of the serial testing programme of food production facilities carried out 29,735 tests with 121 of these tests detected. This represents a detected rate of 0.41%. Cycle 2 of serial testing of food production facilities has commenced on 12th of October for a four-week cycle. To date, Cycle 2 has carried out 8,440 tests with 72 detected cases. This represents a detected rate of 0.85%. The HSE is working closely with internal and external stakeholders to identify and implement improvements which can be built into the serial testing programme. This is unrelated to outbreak testing, it is serial testing of asymptomatic staff.

Where an outbreak occurs in a meat or food processing facility then outbreak mass testing will still occur. Public Health will be in touch locally in those situations. If a plant has confirmed cases there is a Public Health Assessment which determines what interventions are required and the subsequent frequency of testing. In all cases where an individual receives a detected result, the contact tracing process begins.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh O'Beirne

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National Lead for Testing and Tracing