



22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020

Deputy Réada Cronin,  
Dáil Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 29319/20 - To ask the Minister for Health the reason HSE audiology has not been ring-fenced as an essential service for children who are deaf and hard of hearing; if he will make a commitment to ring-fencing that vital service in the future even in the event of further Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Réada Cronin**

- Réada Cronin

Dear Deputy Cronin,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

COVID-19 has caused disruption to many of our key services, and many staff in community services have been redeployed to provide a range of new Covid-19 services as part of the national pandemic response. Like many other community services, audiology services in Primary Care have reduced significantly in this period, although core audiology services have continued, focussing primarily on remote supports for adults and children on existing caseloads. In addition audiologists in the community continue to support the diagnostic assessment of babies screened as part of the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme in our maternity hospitals.

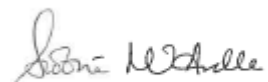
The HSE have developed a formal programme of work under the governance of the Chief Clinical Officer and Chief Operations Officer namely the Continuity of System Wide Healthcare Services Steering Group. The focus is to plan the recommencement of the delivery of Non-COVID Services to address ongoing clinical demands while maintaining capacity for COVID-19 rapid response.

All service areas, including audiology services are considered as part of this planning process however at this point we are not in a position to be definitive about the actual date of when all of these services are expected to return to pre-Covid-19 levels. This programme of work is a priority for the Health Service Executive and every effort will be made to restore non-COVID services as soon as possible in a safe and effective way.

Service resumption is within the context of; "A safe return to health services – restoring services in a Covid Environment" and public health guidance as it evolves through implementation of the Governments "Resilience and Recovery 2020 – 2021: Plan for Living with Covid-19".

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



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Siobhán McArdle,  
Head of Operations Primary Care,  
Community Operations