

24th September 2020

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd
Dáil Éireann
Leinster house
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 20/24782 – To ask the Minister for Health if a Covid-19 test centre will be opened in Drogheda, County Louth in view of the ongoing pandemic; the number of persons being referred for testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter– Fergus O'Dowd.

Dear Deputy O'Dowd,

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 outline the position as follows.

I wish to address and clarify matters concerning COVID19 Testing for County Louth (and touch on other testing issues for the other counties in CHO8).

Activity in Testing Centres

It may first be important to get a picture of the activity up to 22 Sept for the 6 counties:

Testing	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Laois	431	803	1166	371	0	1405	2198				6374
Offaly	1051	604	1649	456	1061	3069	3979				11869
Longford	448	461	897	103	139	0	0				2048
Westmeath	1251	892	1495	515	788	2362	3912				11215
Louth	587	1353	1865	705	938	2137	4005				11590
Meath	254	1657	1862	871	1318	3820	6065				15847
Residential Centre Testing	0	3508	306	40	4210	249	0				8313
Other off site Testing	0	0	67	0	0	1687	1840				3594
Total Tested	4022	9278	9307	3061	8454	14729	21999				70850

Note

1. Longford Testing Centre ceased operation on 11th July and all referrals since have been accommodated in Westmeath Testing Centre
2. Laois Testing Centre ceased operation between 19th June and 8th August. All referrals have been accommodated in Tullamore Testing Centre during that period. Testing recommenced in Portlaoise on 9th August.

The table above shows clearly the significant demand for tests during August and now into September.

In addition to the above Static Centres, there is also Serial Testing happening in Residential Care Facilities, Meat Factories and Direct Provision Centres on a regular basis and with the support of existing staff, and colleagues from the National Ambulance Service and the Army, these demands are met.

Evolution of Testing Centres

Initially each county had one Test Centre and it was very much located where you could get accommodation and had staff.

In Louth, we started off in Muirhevnamore, then moved to Dundalk IT who supported us (as indeed did Athlone IT in Westmeath) and then moved back to Muirhevnamore.

As activity reduced in the Summer period, the plan was to consolidate testing into 1 per 2 counties – with the primary hubs for CHO8 being

- Tullamore – for Offaly and Laois
- Mullingar - for Westmeath and Longford
- Ardee – for Louth and Meath

By August, with the exception of Ardee (where refurbishment work was/is ongoing in the St Brigids Complex), consolidation has taken place. The purpose of the consolidation was to maximise and make the most effective efficient use of staff. It must be borne in mind that these staff are all existing HSE staff who have redeployed into this front line in the battle against COVID19.

The Laois/Offaly/Kildare Lockdown in August informed us that during a lockdown there would need to be capacity for “pop-up” testing centers where, if required during a lockdown scenario i.e. there was no test center in Laois.

By end August the position we are working towards was that there would be a least one testing centre in each county and that no one would have to travel for longer than 45 minutes. We are currently progressing this.

Louth Focus

For Louth we are currently in Muirhevnamore Health Centre and we will be moving to the HSE St Bridgid’s Complex, Ardee in October.

The daily completed tests in Muirehevnamore for 15-22 Sept has been – 193,205,205,228,173,69,219 & 238.

The vast majority of those referred for tests in Louth get the test on the same day or next day and I must acknowledge the hardwork of staff in this regard.

Ardee, in HSE’s own St Brigid’s Complex, will provide fit for purpose facilities and when fully operational will be able to provide increased capacity, based on demand, from up to 6 lanes up to 8-8, 7 days a week Monday-Sunday. This will have conservative capacity of over 3,500 tests a week if required – more than adequately meeting current demand for county Louth.

HSE Estates review options when and if required and have led on the refurbishment works for St Bridgid’s Complex in Ardee.

I note suggestion around locating a testing centre in Drogheda, and all locations would be considered, if and when required. HSE Estates have also received offers from the community, as well as property owners also. It must be noted more critical than a building / location in of itself is the staffing requirement and supports. We currently are only operating at one location per county in the 6 counties and this ensures the best governance, most effective use of staff and most importantly the maximum number of individuals getting tested safely.

If there are requirements for individuals to be home tested, where clinically indicated, this can be indicated by the GP, when making the referral and the National Ambulance Service can provide this service.

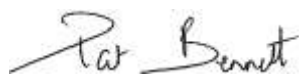
Assessment Hub

The Assessment Hub for Louth is based in Donore Road, Drogheda. The operation of the Assessment Hub has been suspended for the present due to lack of referrals however it will be stood up again to meet demand when required. The provision of an Assessment Hub is part of the Governments strategy in the management of COVID. Local GPs (and trainee GPs) are to to the forefront of this work and we work closely on the ongoing monitoring of this.

The CHO's decision was to base it's COVID Testing in Dundalk and the Assessment Hub in Drogheda based on availability of suitable accommodation.

I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Bennett', written over a horizontal line.

Pat Bennett
Chief Officer
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation