

12th October 2020

Deputy David Cullinane
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 25353/20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the estimated percentage of the population which lives within one hour of a Covid-19 swab test centre; the estimated percentage which will have access to the service within one hour of their home as envisaged under the Plan for Living with Covid-19; the time frame for the service to materialise; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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

I wish to apologise for the delay in issuing a response to your above question.

Due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and the numerous queries we have received to date it has taken longer than I would've liked to respond.

There are currently 37 testing centres in operation nationally, a combination of permanent Community Testing Centres and temporary “pop-up” testing centres. Currently all counties in Ireland have at least one testing centre with the exception of County Leitrim where a centre is currently being planned. Centres operate on an appointment only basis, providing appointments for people with suspected Covid-19 symptoms referred by their GP. In addition close contacts of positive cases are referred by the HSE Contact Tracing Team for Covid-19 testing in the centres. Many testing centres support drive through testing and all accommodate appointments in the test centre itself to those that arrive on foot or bicycle.

The HSE continually monitors the demand for testing on both a national and regional level in order to ensure that Covid-19 testing is available to all persons quickly. As needed, increased capacity for testing is added. This is accomplished through the extension of testing centre opening hours and, as needed, the set-up of additional temporary testing centres. In the past two weeks temporary testing centres have opened in Donegal, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Wexford and Dublin in response to local increased demand.

The HSE also continually monitors the level of attendance at Community Testing Centres. It was identified that there was a higher level of non-attendance for testing in the North Inner City area of Dublin, where many residents have a high reliance on public transport. A temporary testing centre opened in Croke Park in September in response to increased demand in this area. This testing centre is reopening today on a more permanent basis to serve the needs of that local community.


The HSE provides information on its website for members of the public in relation to attending for a Covid-19 test in the community. The content of the website is being updated to provide more detailed guidance on travelling to a test centre.

If a person cannot drive themselves to a test centre, they can ask someone from their household to take them. The person who is getting tested will be required to follow public health measures; including social distancing, practising good personal hygiene and wearing a face-covering in the testing centre and while travelling to and from it. Public transport should be avoided in order to reduce the spread of the virus. We are currently finalising some safety guidance for those giving someone a lift to a Covid 19 test appointment in conjunction with Public Health which will be published on the HSE website shortly. A GP can request a home test if the person's medical condition makes them unable to attend a test centre. Our Community Healthcare Organisations also try to assist on the basis of clinical need, working with the National Ambulance Service and local GPs.

The HSE Covid-19 Community Testing Service is committed to the timely provision of safe, accessible, quality swabbing services within the community setting. Over the past seven days, over 95% of all persons referred for testing were offered a test appointment on the same or next day

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing