

20th October 2020

Deputy Matt Shanahan
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 26303/20 Question: “To ask the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (re: Direct Provision Centre Waterford) regarding a refusal to be swabbed for Covid-19; the refusal rate at the centre; the legal powers of the HSE to demand that swabs be taken in circumstances in which disease risk is suspected but persons refuse permission; the rates of refusal at other centres nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Shanahan,

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.

I'm sure you will understand we cannot comment on individual cases or facilities but I wish to confirm the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) requested the planned programme of Testing of all Staff and Residents in an agreed list of Direct Provision Centres (DPCs) over a 2- week period. This period of Testing ran from September 12th – 25th September 2020. A Working Group developed key principles of testing in this environment. These included that testing would be voluntary and performed with consent. The testing of children under 5 was not proposed and only undertaken if specifically requested by parents/guardians. Children aged 5 and over and under 16 were included in testing if requested and with parental/guardian consent. It was also advised by the group that children should only be tested once unless there is a strong Public Health imperative.

The Working Group recommended that further serial testing was not required based on the low level of positive cases identified, (0.5%) and the considerable complexities in testing this population. They also confirmed that outbreak and cluster management is the overriding priority if it arises, and that increased infection prevention and control support in line with Outbreak Guidance DPC and Vulnerable Group Guidance offered in tandem with testing

Since the beginning of this year, a number of guidelines, measures and strategies have been put in place to manage Covid-19 in Direct Provision and please see below for your information:

[International Protection Accommodation COVID-19 Response; cohesive HSE/IPAS response to testing and outbreak management Social Inclusion Public Health/IPAS, 20th May 2020](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for International Protection Accommodation Service \(IPAS\) Settings V5 01/10/2020](#)

I trust this clarifies your queries raised.

Niamh O'Beirne

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National Lead for Testing and Tracing