

20th October 2020

Deputy Peadar Tóibín
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 26642/20

Question: "To ask the Minister for Health the process for Covid-19 testing specifically for routine testing in nursing homes; the location swabs are sent; the average wait time; and the longest wait time for processing and return of results".

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

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.

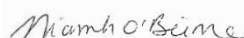
The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) requested a planned programme of serial testing of all staff in residential care facilities (RCFs) for older people. There have been to date three completed cycles of Serial Testing and we are currently on the fourth cycle. Cycle 1 of the programme commenced with weekly testing on June 24th and concluded on July 26th. Following NPHE's recommendations the serial testing cycles moved to testing all staff in RCFs for COVID-19 once a fortnight, for four consecutive weeks.

The 2nd Cycle of the programme ran from August 10th with the final day of testing on September 4th. Cycle 3 of the Serial Testing in nursing homes commenced on Wednesday 16th September and concluded on Tuesday 13th of October. During Cycles 1-3 there were 219,360 tests conducted in 574 facilities with a total of 504 detected cases which is a 0.23% positivity rate. The vast majority of tests are processed in one laboratory and 90-95% of results are communicated in 48 hours or less. We are continuing to keep sharp focus on end-to-end turnaround times, while recognising that some cases are increasingly complex in nature. Cycle 4 of serial testing of all staff in RCFs commenced on Wednesday, 14th of October. As of 20th of October, there has been 13,929 tests carried out, with 106 cases detected. This represents a detected rate of 0.78%.

A number of improvement initiatives continue to be in place for the serial testing of all staff in RCFs. These include revised timetables for swab collections, automated reporting via dashboards, training material to support the RCFs in both swabbing and packaging of swabs and the set-up of direct access to the test referral system, for each RCFs to improve data quality.

I trust this clarifies your queries raised.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing