



19th April 2021

Deputy David Cullinane
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 18972/21 “To ask the Minister for Health the number of confirmed Covid cases for the months of February and March 2021, respectively; the number of these cases in which contact tracing was carried out; the number of cases in which the lookback and tracing was greater than 48 hours, five days and seven days in tabular form; 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 have provided a breakdown below of the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 for the months of February and March 2021 along with the number of cases in which Contact Tracing was carried out:

Month	No. of records in Covid Care Tracker (CCT)	No. of cases successfully contact traced (CCT Data)
February 2021	25,471	24,145
March 2021	18,079	17,232

Please note these records are from the Contact Tracing Database (Covid Care Tracker) and this is always slightly higher than the number of cases reported by Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), therefore a certain amount of records may be sequential positive results and are counted as multiple cases. The validation process of multiple records happens at a later stage.

A small percentage (approx. 5%) are uncontactable. This can be due to a variety of reasons such as incorrect phone number, a person may decide not to answer the phone, they may be too ill to talk to a Contact Tracer, or in some cases the person may have very sadly passed away.

I wish to confirm the standard lookback period for contact tracing up to 31st March 2021 was a 48 hour period. However, as of 31st March, Contact Tracing Centres are, in the case of individuals that have been identified as a detected case from community transmission, looking back seven days prior to the onset of symptoms (available data indicates that approximately 20% of detected cases are identified as relating to community transmission with no specific source identified on initial contact with the individuals concerned). The objective of case source investigation is to identify the source of infection and other contacts who might have been exposed at the same time in order to disrupt the chain of transmission of Covid-19 to the greatest extent possible.

The effectiveness of Case Source Investigation is dependent on the incidence rate and burden of disease at any point in time. Low levels of infection in a country represents an opportunity to chase-down the remaining cases. Source investigation is something that Departments of Public Health have been doing throughout the pandemic. This recent initiative is designed to facilitate the work of the regional Departments of Public Health by carrying out Source Investigation on a greater scale via the work of our Contact Tracing Centres.



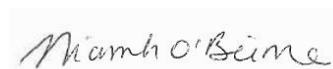
Please see below a summary of the Source Investigation activity undertaken by the CMP during the first week following implementation (31st March to 6th April 2021) which we hope you find of assistance:

Of the 3,476 cases who had surveillance data in the form of a Positive Patient Assessment captured on the CovidCare Tracker between 31st March and 6th April, case source investigation into possible sources of transmission was performed by contact tracers for 556 (16%) cases. 474 cases were identified to Departments of Public Health for further investigation, where required.

Prior to the implementation of 7 day retrospective contact tracing, we were measuring positivity rates amongst different groups of close contacts (e.g. social, household, schools etc.) to monitor patterns of transmission in the cohort of close contacts managed by the CMP. This work allows us to determine the likely source of infection for close contacts who become cases. The first report on this was produced for the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) in September 2020 and we currently produce analysis on this each week for NPHE.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead Testing and Tracing