



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Ms. Jennifer Murnane O'Connor TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 19321/21

To ask the Minister for Health the initiatives being taken to improve dental and orthodontic services in the south east especially in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Murnane O'Connor,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which was submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

I have examined the matter and the following response outlines the current position.

HSE Dental Services

The HSE Dental Service is provided on the basis of need with a strong emphasis on prevention. This is delivered through targeted screening and prevention for school children at certain dental developmental milestones. This approach involves identifying children with the greatest needs and the highest risks of dental disease. In addition emergency care for the relief of pain and infection is available to children up to the age of 15 years.

Unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the delivery of all HSE dental services over the past 12 months. Additional infection control measures have been put in place resulting in a reduced number of clinics. Many dental staff members were redeployed as part of the priority Covid-19 response. The additional Covid-19 related procedures have resulted in a significantly reduced throughput of patients and this is unlikely to change in the short-to-medium term. However it is hoped that waiting lists across all services will be reviewed during 2021.

It should be noted that the HSE has continued to provide emergency dental services throughout the pandemic.

The resumption of elective dental services that were phased down due to the Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing. All service locations are implementing social distancing and other organisational measures as well as infection prevention and control guidance which have been updated throughout the pandemic. As part of the resumption of services in each dental area will be their screening and treatment service for children. Clinicians are reviewing records of children that were under treatment at the time when services were phased down and priority is being given to patients who need to be seen urgently.

HSE Orthodontic Services

Orthodontic treatment is provided by the HSE where the person is eligible under HSE guidelines. A modified Index of Treatment Needs (IOTN) system is used to determine if a child can be accepted for treatment.

Once a person is deemed eligible they are placed on the orthodontic treatment waiting list. Unfortunately the HSE Orthodontic Service has had an extensive waiting list which has increased significantly over the last few years due to the challenges between increased demand for services and the availability of trained staff.

As with other HSE services, the Orthodontic waiting list was significantly impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and resulting measures put in place. Waiting times have now increased as no new entrants have been called from the orthodontic waiting list since March 2020 due to reduced capacity in adhering to Covid-19 measures. The Consultant Orthodontist is required to comply with national guidance and hospital regulations and only when restrictions ease will new patients begin to be called from the waiting list.

Initiatives to address Orthodontic Waiting Lists include:

- A national Orthodontic Procurement Initiative was introduced in 2016.
- There will be a national orthodontic waiting list initiative this year aimed at those 'long waiters' i.e. those waiting over 4 years who fall into the IOTN category 4. It is hoped that this may have a resulting impact on all orthodontic waiting lists.
- Prioritisation of Care: All orthodontic services prioritise the provision of care for those patients identified as having the greatest needs and the highest risk of developing dental disease.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Jeanne Hendrick
A/Head of Service-Primary Care
South East Community Healthcare