



14th January 2022

Deputy Alan Farrell,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: alan.farrell@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 60137/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the current level of genome sequencing in Ireland with regard to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ Number: 60138/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the efforts being made to increase genome sequencing of Covid-19 in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Farrell,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions which were referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response and wish to apologise for the delay in responding to same due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Whole Genomic Sequencing (WGS) in Ireland is undertaken through the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL) and associated laboratories.

In accordance with ECDC guidelines, the NVRL is sequencing sufficient numbers (1500 cases per week) for its current caseload. This gives us the capability to detect a new variant circulating at a prevalence of 1% in the population. In addition, use of a specific assay (TaqPath assay) at the NVRL satellite lab at Backweston has enabled us to monitor the prevalence of Omicron in the community in real time.

Ireland has uploaded more than 43,000 sequences to GISAID in the course of the pandemic, while also retaining the ability to prioritise urgent cases, as evidenced by the recent confirmation of Omicron in a returning traveller.

Additional Whole Genomic Sequencing (WGS) capacity was identified by the HSE in December to provide further resilience over the winter months and to support any surge in demand. The HSE has secured access to a further 50% uplift on existing capacity to meet any immediate needs of the service.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Damien McCallion
National Director
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme