



2nd March 2021

Deputy Cormac Devlin
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 8383/21 Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the strategy in place regarding testing of all residents and staff of nursing homes along with patients returning from hospital visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Devlin,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

The referral pathway for Covid-19 with regards to residents in Residential Care Facilities (RCFs) is outlined by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC). All symptomatic residents are tested for Covid-19 following a clinical assessment. When there is a suspicion of cases of Covid-19 in a RCF the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) will perform a Public Health Risk Assessment to determine whether there is either possible or confirmed active transmission in the facility. Public Health doctors from the Regional Department of Public Health will provide overall leadership for the management of the Covid-19 outbreak and will liaise directly with facilities to advise on necessary actions. I have provided the below link to the *Covid-19 Interim Public Health, Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Covid-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities* for your information:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/residentialcarefacilities/IPC%20and%20PH%20guidance%20for%20outbreaks%20RCF.pdf>

In relation to the testing of staff in nursing homes, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) requested a planned programme of serial testing of all staff in RCFs for older people. This commenced on June 24th and testing takes place fortnightly. We are currently in the eighth cycle and to date have conducted 611,459 tests in this Serial Testing programme which is an overall positivity rate of 0.73%. A number of improvement initiatives have been put 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 RCF to improve data quality.

With regards to the testing of patients returning from an acute setting, the HPSC provide Guidance on Covid-19 admissions, transfers to and discharges from residential care facilities which outlines that, “If a person is being transferred from an acute hospital to a Long Term Residential Care Facility (LTRCF), the hospital should arrange for the person to be swabbed in the three days before transfer. The person will need to be isolated for 14 days regardless of the test result. There is an exception to this requirement if the person diagnosed with Covid-19 in the previous 12 weeks




and who is no longer infectious (more than 14 days after onset) as a result of that infection.” This guidance is available on the HPSC website and I have included the below link for your information:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/residentialcarefacilities/Guidelines%20on%20admissions%20transfers%20to%20and%20discharges%20from%20RCF.pdf>

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead Testing and Tracing

