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Deputy David Cullinane  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2  
1<sup>st</sup> March 2021

**PQ ref: 8479/21**

**Question:** To ask the Minister for Health the operational status of STI screening, vaccination and PrEP services; when these services will fully resume; if they will be deemed essential; his plans for expanding these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

Thank you for your question to the Minister for Health, which was forwarded to my office to respond to you directly.

The recent wave of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the acute hospital system, resulting in many public STI services having to again restrict services to emergency appointments only. Over the last year, public STI services re-configured services, such as establishing online booking systems, and providing virtual appointments, in order to support STI service provision in line with the social distancing requirements due to COVID-19. These systems allowed services to remain operational during the second wave of COVID-19 and will support the resumption of STI services as soon as service and staff capacity permits as part of the overall phased prioritised reintroduction of services. The timeframe for each STI service will be based on the COVID-19 situation in each of the hospitals.

A number of vaccinations are provided within public STI services. Services are prioritising those who have commenced vaccination schedules, in order to complete the schedule within recommended timeframes.

The PrEP service continued to expand in 2020. At the end of 2020, there were eleven public and nine private approved PrEP service providers in Ireland. One additional public STI service has received funding to commence a PrEP service this year.

<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/prep/where-to-get-prep/>

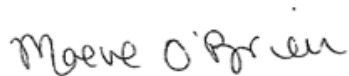
The remaining public STI clinics are satellite clinics to the larger STI services and assess patients for PrEP and refer them to the PrEP clinics as required.

A review of the approval process and an audit of existing services against the national PrEP standards will be conducted this year to inform the continued roll-out of the PrEP service.

Although PrEP services faced service restrictions in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people accessing the national PrEP programme increased. As the Covid-19 situation improves, service capacity will improve also, and it is anticipated that the numbers accessing the national PrEP programme will continue to increase.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the HSE Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) have been in regular communication with public STI services and are working together with HIV Ireland to maintain an updated list of service restrictions for service users. <https://www.hivireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/Sexual-Health-Service-Restrictions.pdf>

Yours Sincerely



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**Maeve O'Brien**

Interim Programme Lead

Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme