



**Health Protection Surveillance Centre**  
25-27 Middle Gardiner Street  
Dublin, Ireland,  
D01 A4A3  
Ph +353 1 8765300  
Fx +353 1 8561299  
[info@hpsc.ie](mailto:info@hpsc.ie)  
[www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

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Deputy Alan Farrell  
Dáil Éireann,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 9887/21 To ask the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to address the gap in data relating to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV in the absence of regular screening and testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Farrell

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 COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented interruptions to normal healthcare activity, with most services affected, including public STI clinics and related testing services. Some facilities have been affected by the necessary redeployment of personnel to COVID-19 testing and vaccination duties.

In relation to STI and HIV data <<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/>>, this continues to be reported on a weekly basis. Further resources for surveillance services in Public Health are also being made available to facilitate the collection of more enhanced STI data information.

HIV testing is included within a standard STI test and is free in public STI clinics. Nationally there are 22 public STI services: <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/hse-sti-services-in-ireland.html> <<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/hse-sti-services-in-ireland.html>>. Due to the current impact of Covid-19 on the hospital system, a number of public STI services are closed or restricted to emergency appointments only. All public STI clinics are continuing to face service restrictions as a result of social distancing requirements, as waiting rooms can only hold a fraction of patients compared to before the pandemic. Most clinics are operating an appointment only system and priority is being given to those with symptoms or requiring treatment.

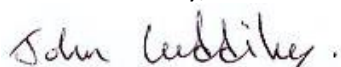
The HSE provides funding to community NGO partners who work with populations at higher risk of HIV. Free rapid HIV testing is available in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick through community NGO partners HIV Ireland, Sexual Health Centre Cork, Sexual Health West and GOSHH. As many community testing venues are closed due to COVID-19, the NGO partners have adapted their services and are currently providing free rapid HIV testing from their offices or alternative venues. More detail is available on their websites.

To address the impact of COVID-19 on these services, some additional STI/HIV testing is currently available through a HSE home STI testing pilot project in Dublin, Cork and Kerry. The first phase of tests was made available early January 2021 and additional tests will be made available over the coming months. Tests are being made available in a phased manner to ensure there is sufficient capacity in local clinics for service users who may need follow-up treatment or support.

In general, work is ongoing with services, stakeholders and community groups in order to provide the best possible information and options to service users under the circumstances. Resources such as <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/> <<https://scanner.topsec.com/?d=1823&t=da4c43108a91df38aae01666fe1de72af559d8ee&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sexualwellbeing.ie%2F>> , <https://man2man.ie/> <<https://scanner.topsec.com/?d=1823&t=5c4e4f67c80bcf742f2bc6262b0fac4f941610b&u=https%3A%2F%2Fman2man.ie%2F>> and <https://www.hivireland.ie/> <<https://scanner.topsec.com/?d=1823&t=537ae9ccc48fef82c50482aedeff666bd61ddb9&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hivireland.ie%2F>> are regularly updated to reflect the realities of current service delivery and to signpost users to the services they need, including currently available HIV testing options.

If you require any further information or clarification please do contact us.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr John Cuddihy,**  
**Interim Director of HPSC,**  
**25-27, Middle Gardiner St.,**  
**Dublin 1.**  
MRN: 016227