



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta um Phleanáil agus Chlaochlú Straitéiseach  
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8<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Deputy Gary Gannon  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**RE: PQ number 1631/21**

Dear Deputy Gannon,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above referenced Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health. The question concerned was referred by colleagues in Parliamentary Affairs to Strategic Planning and Transformation in the HSE for review and direct response, as we are managing the HSE's Covid-19 Contact Management Programme (CMP).

Please accept my apologies for the delay in issuing this response to you.

**Parliamentary Question: To ask the Minister for Health if he will consider issuing a statement to have all contact tracers work from home in line with current public health advice from the Chief Medical Officer – Deputy Gary Gannon**

**Response:** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) issued revised [Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19](#) concerning working arrangements and temporary assignments across the Public Service dated the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021. In line with this, the HSE has issued [HR circular 005/2021](#). This circular outlines the guidelines for staff to work from home where possible. The guidance also refers to the need for certain workers to continue to attend the workplace, with the employer making it as safe as possible for them to do so, which is in line with public health guidance and advice, and for employees to also work to suppress COVID-19 in the work place by following all measures put in place by their employers. Physical/Social distancing, hand washing, cough/sneezing etiquette and wearing masks remain the cornerstones of public health advice in this regard, as set out in the guidance concerned.

Specifically the framework provides for Home working to continue where possible. The Framework states that home working will continue as and when deemed appropriate by the employer, having regard to the changes that may be required at each level of the current Government framework for the public sector. However; Home working must be balanced with the requirement to continue to provide the most effective and efficient healthcare services to the public, in line with the provisions of the Framework.

Before an index patient's close contacts can be traced, they receive a telephone call from an experienced tracer with a clinical background who confirms their diagnosis and provides Public Health advice which is tailored to that individuals' circumstances, environment and underlying conditions. As these calls are increasingly complex (due to congregated settings, new variants, etc), the Contact Management Programme (CMP)



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provides additional clinical supports for Contact Tracers to ensure that the service user receives the optimal level of care in line with HSE values and Sláintecare principles.

Subsequent calls to Close Contacts may also be difficult. Identified Close Contacts can be scared, confused and reluctant to engage in the Contact Tracing process. It is not uncommon for Contact Tracers to require additional emotional and psychological support during and after particularly difficult calls. The provision of such supports is significantly more effective and efficient when available 'in real time' in the same location.

The CMP recognises it's ethical and legal obligations to protect the privacy of service users. Performing Contact Tracing duties while working from home would undermine the various technological and organisational measures that have been developed since the start of the pandemic.

In short, the exigency of the services does not facilitate working from home.

I trust this response deals with your query however; if you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Yours sincerely,

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Sarah Ryan  
Business Manager  
Office of the National Director, Strategic Planning and Transformation and Head of CMP



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