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Deputy David Cullinane
Dail Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

4th February 2021

PQ ref: 4277/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health if regular HIV testing is ongoing at the same or reduced rate; if it has halted due to the closure of sexual health clinics; 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 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.

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>. 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.

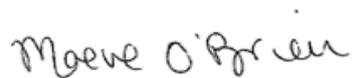
The HSE provides funding to community NGO partners who work with populations at higher risk of HIV. Free rapid HIV testing is available in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick through community NGO partners HIV Ireland, Sexual Health Centre Cork, Sexual Health West and GOSHH. As many community testing venues 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.

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 were made available early January 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://man2man.ie/> and <https://www.hivireland.ie/> 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.

Yours Sincerely



Maeve O'Brien

Interim Programme Lead
Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme