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Deputy Mary Lou McDonald  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

19<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**PQ ref: 12683/21**

**Question:** To ask the Minister for Health his plans to address the Covid-19-related challenges faced in delivering both clinical and community-based sexual health services in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Deputy McDonald,

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

Clinical sexual health services have been significantly impacted by wave 3 of COVID-19, resulting in many public STI services having to 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.

NGO-led community-based sexual health services have also been impacted by level 5 Covid restrictions including the closure of community venues for testing, prevention and outreach work. NGOs are providing prevention and support services virtually where possible and conducting community HIV testing via their premises. It is anticipated that community-based services will expand in line with Public Health guidelines as restrictions are eased.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the HSE Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) has been in regular communication with public STI services and is

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

*Maeve O'Brien*

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**Maeve O'Brien**

Interim Programme Lead

Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme