



29th June 2021

Deputy Joe Carey
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 23777/21 “To ask the Minister for Health the delivery date, date of use and type of setting they were used of the 500,000 antigen test kits that were delivered to Ireland via the European Union; if any clusters or outbreaks were identified as a result of same being used; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Carey,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response. We have not been in a position to issue our response until now due to the Cyberware attack on our systems but please now see below information.

I wish to advise that over the past year the HSE has acquired antigen both via RADT providers and via the EU process. In keeping with the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations the HSE sought to deliver its SARS-CoV-2 testing via polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using antigen as a potential backup supply. The HSE acquired antigen capacity in the event that demand for PCR testing outstripped capacity due to surge circumstances in late 2020/2021 when the trajectory of Covid-19 was unclear. In parallel, the HSE Test and Trace Programme committed to strengthening its clinical diagnostics capacity and planned for potential surge in Winter 2020/2021. PCR capacity was increased both in the acute hospital and community laboratory facilities thereby ensuring that there has been sufficient PCR testing available to meet the needs of Public Health throughout that period.

The HSE did however (in keeping with HIQA advice) conduct a number of validation studies on antigen usage, one study included a large number of food processing facilities over a number of weeks. These studies operated antigen and PCR in parallel. I wish to advise antigen testing did not detect any outbreaks as part of this process. Over the past number of months the meat processing sector has continued to utilise antigen testing at approximately 20 sites each week, utilising antigen testing kits provided by the HSE. Approximately 160,000 antigen kits have been distributed for use within the meat processing and broader health system to date. No outbreaks have been detected as part of this mechanism to date. Meat processors continue to avail of serialised PCR testing.

The HSE continues to make antigen testing available to outbreak management teams and acute hospitals. Where clinically relevant antigen is used by the outbreak management group, due to the available capacity and sensitivity of PCR testing, the HSE continues to focus on this testing methodology.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead Testing and Tracing

