

6th Dec. 2021

Deputy Duncan Smith,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: duncan.smith@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 55530/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the number of times the HSE has conducted a double Covid-19 test on a person when the first test result was positive; the clinical grounds for a second test taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Duncan Smith

PQ Number: 55531/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the number of instances of Covid-19 case denotification that have taken place since March 2020 for cases which were examined against viral targets detected, the reason for the test and the condition of the person having the test performed as criteria set out by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ Number: 55532/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the viral target measures used when examining whether a positive Covid-19 test requires a second test; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smith,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

There may be circumstances whereby an individual undergoes additional COVID testing, following a detected SARS-CoV-2 result. Samples are taken in different settings, including community testing centres and acute hospitals and therefore the clinical circumstances and timing between tests can vary significantly. In certain instances, and where clinically indicated, a repeat test may be recommended for an individual. This is typically based on a discussion between the testing laboratory and the referring clinician, and takes into account a number of factors, such as the laboratory result itself, including viral targets detected etc., the reason for the test, and the condition of the person having the test performed.

The HSE asks individuals not to attend for additional PCR testing if they have tested positive in the last nine months for COVID-19. However, there can be circumstances where a further COVID-19 test may be considered clinically relevant. It is also important to note in an acute hospital setting an individual can be subject to repeat COVID-19 testing as part of the ongoing management of their condition.

The HSE provides a number of testing pathways which includes a self-referral portal. Individuals are requested to book a PCR test if they are symptomatic, and can avail of testing if they are a close contact.

When booking a test on the portal it is asked that individuals not attend for PCR testing if they have tested positive in the past nine months, however as previously stated there can be circumstances where a further COVID-19 test may be considered clinically relevant. The testing laboratory will not always be aware of the reason for the test, particularly in the case of community based testing.

In some cases, where an original test result has been denotified by the testing laboratory, it is not necessarily due to a repeat test being conducted but can be related to additional analysis of an existing sample. An average of 21 test result denotifications take place each month in the Test & Trace Programme. For context, over 2,160,000 PCR tests were conducted and reported between August 1st and November 11th 2021. In this period the HSE recorded 45 denotifications within the community testing system.

The HSE has a range of testing platforms across its combined community and acute hospital clinical diagnostics network. Testing assay manufacturers determine the viral target thresholds for the individual tests, and laboratories apply these thresholds when generating testing results. PCR is an extremely sensitive testing method, with the capability of identifying very low levels of the virus. A subsequent test can be undertaken if it is considered important to understand whether the viral load is increasing, or declining.

As with any medical test or investigation, the test itself is only one part of the overall patient interaction, which typically includes a clinical assessment or evaluation. Following the assessment, if a diagnostic test is indicated, it might be performed to confirm a clinical diagnosis, or it might be performed with the specific intention of excluding a particular diagnosis, to allow for targeted alternative investigations or interventions. As advised the testing laboratory will not always be aware of the reason for the test

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Damien McCallion
National Director
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme