



Department of Public Health  
HSE South East  
Lacken  
Dublin Road  
Kilkenny

16<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Deputy Mattie McGrath  
Dáil Éireann,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 55675/21 To ask the Minister for Health if he will outline NPHEP's view on the rising infection rate in County Waterford which remains the highest Covid infection rate in the country for a number of weeks while the county has the highest vaccination rate in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy McGrath

***The above PQ was transferred to the Department of Public Health HSE South East for response. The following contains the views of the Department of Public Health SE.***

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

County Waterford continues to have one of the highest 14-day COVID-19 incidence rates in the country at 1512 cases per 100,000 as at 13/12/21. The rate is high but relatively stable in recent weeks. Within Waterford the rates in Portlaw - Kilmacthomas, and Waterford City South local electoral areas (LEAs) are also higher than the national average. However, the rates across all Waterford LEAs are above 1000 per 100,000 population. This is consistent with widespread community transmission throughout county Waterford, as is being seen throughout Ireland at the moment.

Due to the high number of cases in Waterford as elsewhere, it is not possible to have an overview of all individual outbreaks as would previously have been available. The South East Public Health department is working to support control of cases and outbreaks in a number of high priority settings in Waterford, prioritising as always more vulnerable groups particularly in congregate settings such as nursing homes and other residential care facilities. These account for a small proportion of the overall case numbers.

The vaccination rate in Waterford is very high at over 99.9% of eligible adults which is very protective for the population. Vaccination rates are lower in younger age groups, e.g. 12-17 years (75%) and 18-19 years (89%). Together with those not yet offered vaccination, this means there are still significant numbers of people who do not have protection through vaccination, even where the overall adult vaccination rate is high. Waning of immunity in those who were fully vaccinated 6 months ago or more may also be playing a part in the current high case numbers. Those in the over 75 age groups, which have a very high rate of vaccination, and also now of booster vaccinations, now have much lower COVID-19 incidence rates than the rest of the population.

Fully vaccinated people may still get COVID-19 and transmit it onwards, although it is less likely, and they are far less likely to be admitted to hospital or have other serious outcomes, than people who are unvaccinated. As a result, we

are seeing far fewer hospital and ICU admissions at the moment than with comparable incidence rates in earlier waves.

If you require any further information or clarification please do contact us.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Carmel Mullaney**  
**Director of Public Health**  
**Department of Public Health**  
**HSE South East**