

2nd Dec. 2021

Deputy Alan Dillon,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: alan.dillon@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 56423/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health if antigen tests will be supplied to preschools and crèches for testing close contacts of a confirmed Covid-19 case; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Dillon,

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

The Health Service Executive supported the roll-out of an antigen testing pilot programmes in a number of childcare facilities. Over 200 staff across 19 childcare sites completed the pilot programme. The purpose of the pilots was to assess the operational feasibility of rolling out a wider antigen testing programme. The HSE, working with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth used these pilots to learn more about how antigen testing might be used more widely in childcare settings. To note, the pilot programme involved staff only and the testing of children was outside the scope of the pilot.

The pilot programme helped to identify key requirements to underpin a successful antigen testing programme. The biggest challenge to large-scale roll out is managing the supply, distribution and tracking of test kits and all of the pilot sites identified that there was an administrative burden associated with taking part in the antigen programme. There was also concern expressed within the childcare sector regarding the risk of antigen users taking false reassurance from a negative test result.

The provision of antigen tests for asymptomatic children and staff in Primary schools, who are identified as members of a pod with a confirmed Covid-19 case, commenced on Monday 29th November.

We continue to actively engage with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the operational aspects of implementing a wider use of antigen testing in childcare settings which would follow a similar pathway to that used in Primary Schools. We expect to conclude a plan for this sector shortly.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



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