



13 December 2021

Deputy Peadar Tóibín
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

58717/21: To ask the Minister for Health the total number of children currently on waiting lists for dental appointments in the State by county figure; and the length of time persons have spent on the waiting lists.

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the data is not readily available in the manner requested. In answering the above Parliamentary Questions, it is important to note the following:

- i. Eligibility for dental services is a statutory entitlement under the Health Acts. Almost one million children aged up to and including 15 years are eligible for HSE Dental services. All of the HSE Dental Services are provided free of charge.
- ii. Routine dental services are targeted at certain age groups, and use school class as part of the targeting of services, therefore the academic year can be a factor in reporting progress of targeted programmes. In many instances, information is not held in a format that facilitates the response to the question.
- iii. The HSE Routine Dental Services are provided on the basis of need, with a strong emphasis on prevention. This is delivered through targeted screening and prevention for school children at certain dental developmental milestones and for special needs groups. This approach involves identifying children with the greatest needs, and the highest risks of dental disease.
- iv. Emergency care for the relief of pain (e.g. toothache) and infection is available on a same day/following day basis for all for all children aged up to 15 years, and patients with Special Needs. Approximately 70,000 children attend for emergency treatment each year.
- v. Children in the targeted age groups are typically in 1st/2nd Class and 6th Class, with some 4th Class children being seen in some parts of the country as resources permits. Children in secondary school in general receive only an emergency service.

Following engagement with Community Healthcare Organisations (CHOs), the following outlines the most recent information (September 2021) for oral appointment waiting lists since academic year 2018/2019;

CHO 1

| Year | 6 th Class waiting list for routine check up | 1 st & 2 nd Class routine check up | Total |
|-----------|---|--|-------|
| 2018/2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019/2020 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020/2021 | 3975 | 2951 | 6926 |
| 2021/2022 | No information available to date | No information available to date | |

CHO 2

| Children awaiting routine 2 nd & 6 th class dental check (Galway) | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| 2 nd Class | 858 | 2564 | 2874 |
| 6 th Class | 899 | 2441 | 2761 |

| Children awaiting routine 2 nd & 6 th class dental check (Mayo and Roscommon) | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| 2 nd Class | 300 | 1300 | 2700 |
| 6 th Class | 300 | 600 | 2000 |

CHO 3

| Year | CHO 3 Dental Areas | | | Total |
|----------|--------------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| | Limerick* | N Tipp E Lk* | Clare** | |
| 18/19 | 0 | | 0 | 0 |
| 19/20 | 260 | 529 | 80 | 869 |
| 20/21 | 3474 | 3959 | 3148 | 10581 |
| ***21/22 | 3474 | 3959 | 3148 | 10581 |

* Limerick - Primary School Children are seen in 1st & 6th classes

* North Tipperary/East Limerick City - Primary School Children are seen in 1st & 6th classes

** Clare - Primary School Children are seen in 2nd & 6th classes

*** Estimate, as consent forms had not been sent to schools for distribution to students on the date the information was provided.

CHO 4

The Primary Care Dental services team provides dental treatment services to eligible children, medical card holders, adults and children with special needs and others in the care of the HSE at various locations throughout Cork and Kerry. Children under 16 years of age are treated in HSE dental clinics and adults are treated by private dental practitioners contracted to the Health Services under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). Cork Kerry Primary Care Dental Service provides a school screening dental service which aims to target pupils in 2nd and 6th classes.

The emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020 had a significant impact on the provision of all health services including dental services throughout Cork and Kerry. As per our pandemic plan the HSE Dental Service had to curtail service provision to emergency services only and staff were largely redeployed into COVID testing, contact tracing and the vaccination program. The school dental screening program was suspended which has led to significant delays in the service.

While most oral health staff have now returned to core duties enabling the safe resumption of services, strict adherence to physical distancing and enhanced infection prevention and control measures has reduced the capacity of the available staffing from what it would have been pre-Covid and it is necessary to target the resources available. The recent Cyber Attack on the HSE system also had a significant negative impact on all HSE services including Dental services.

In the case of the school dental screening, taking into consideration all available resources at this time, the backlog of 6th class pupils from 2019/2020 is currently being prioritised. When this patient cohort is complete, screening of the 2020/2021 6th class children will commence followed by the recommencement of screening of 2nd class children. Additional resourcing is also being considered including wait list initiatives, and extending opening hours to facilitate additional clinics in the evenings and on Saturdays. The following table shows the current numbers of pupils to be screened:

| Year | County | 2 nd class | 6 th class |
|--------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2017/2018 | Cork | Fully complete | Fully complete |
| 2018/2019 | Cork | Fully complete | Fully complete |
| 2019/2020 | Cork | Not commenced | 300 outstanding |
| 2020/2021 | Cork | Not commenced | 7,500 outstanding |
| Total | | | 7,800 |
| Year | County | 2 nd class | 6 th class |
| 2017/2018 | Kerry | Fully complete | Fully complete |
| 2018/2019 | Kerry | Fully complete | Fully complete |
| 2019/2020 | Kerry | 1417 outstanding | 846 outstanding |
| 2020/2021 | Kerry | 1850 outstanding | 2100 outstanding |
| Total | | 3,267 | 2,946 |

CHO 5

Children are targeted for dental examination in 2nd and 6th classes in primary school. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent HSE cyber-attack, the waiting times for primary school children have been adversely impacted resulting in considerable backlog of work.

However, whilst there is reduced capacity to work within Covid-19 restricted measures, the HSE dental services are endeavouring to clear this backlog of work.

| Area | No. of children still awaiting their routine 2 nd & 6 th class dental check-ups for 2018 | No. of children still awaiting their routine 2nd & 6th class dental check-ups for 2019 | No. of children still awaiting their routine 2nd & 6th class dental check-ups for 2020 | No. of children still awaiting their routine 2nd & 6th class dental check-ups for 2021 (to date) |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Carlow/Kilkenny | 2 nd class: 0 6 th class: 0 | 2 nd class: 437 6 th class: 546 | 2 nd class: 1957 6 th class: 2100 | 2 nd class: 1957* 6 th class: 2100* |
| South Tipperary | 1 st class: 0 6 th class: 0 | 1 st class: 222 6 th class: 413 | 1 st class: 1,113 6 th class: 1,316 | 1 st class: 1,258* 6 th class: 1,343* |
| Waterford | 2nd class: 903 6th class: 19 | 2nd class: 1447 6th class: 1420 | 2nd class: 2064 6th class: 1871 | 2nd class: 2010* 6th class: 1850* |
| Wexford | 2nd class: 1273 6th class: 1641 | 2nd class: 2322 6th class: 2327 | 2nd class: 2226 6th class: 2428 | 2nd class: 2226* 6th class: 2426* |

**Estimated values -total numbers from target classes for 2021 to 2022 school year had not been sought at this time (September 2021) as dental services were not ready to commence dental care.*

Please be assured that the HSE dental service monitors the waiting list on an ongoing basis in the overall context of available resources and prioritisation criteria.

CHO 6

The Principal Dental Surgeon in Community Healthcare East has advised that school data is collated in line with the school calendar. The waiting lists are indicated in the table below for school years 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021.

| School Year | 2nd Class | 6th class |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| 2017/2018 | Nil | Nil |
| 2018/2019 | Nil | Nil |
| 2019/2020 | 4915 | 322 |
| 2020/2021 | 4763 | 4139 |

CHO 7

The tables below represent the numbers awaiting routine examinations, in

- A. Dublin South City and Dublin West, and
- B. Kildare and West Wicklow, and Dublin South West

Table A. Dublin South City, Dublin West

| Class Cohort Awaiting first examination | Academic year 2018/2019 | Academic year 2019/2020 | Academic year 2020/2021 | Total |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Second Class | 0 | 2500 | 3950 | 6450 |
| Sixth Class | 0 | 0 | 3500 | 3500 |
| Totals | | 2500 | 7450 | 9950 |

Table B. Kildare and West Wicklow, and Dublin South West

| Class Cohort Awaiting first examination | Academic year 2018/2019 | Academic year 2019/2020 | Academic year 2020/2021 | Total |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Second Class | 0 | 5586 | 5383 | 10969 |
| Sixth Class | 0 | 2286 | 5896 | 8182 |
| Totals | 0 | 7809 | 11279 | 19151 |

Data for academic year 2021/2022 is not yet available, however it is expected that numbers will be similar to those in 2020/2021.

CHO 8

Given available resources, children in first class national school have not been targeted since 2010 in County Laois, 2018 in Offaly and since 2019 in Longford and Westmeath. Given available resources and current waiting lists, priority is being given to examine and treat all children and adults with special needs and children in sixth class of national school. In line with service priorities and in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), data pertaining to first class national school class lists are not requested from the national schools and is therefore unavailable.

In Louth Meath the classes targeted historically were 1st (not 2nd), and 6th class. Dental check-ups for children in 1st class unfortunately had to be dropped from school year 2019/2020 onwards, in both Louth and Meath, due to shortage of dentists. This decision was made prior to Covid, and the impact of the pandemic has further exacerbated the backlog facing the depleted HSE dental service in Louth & Meath. The numbers given for 1st class for 2019 onwards represent the average annual figure for this cohort of children in Louth and Meath. The numbers for 6th class 2020 & 2021 are also cohort averages.

| | | Waiting list for Primary School children | No. still awaiting routine 2nd class check up | No. still awaiting routine 6th class check up |
|-----------|------|--|---|---|
| Laois | 2018 | 1649 | No Data | 1649 |
| | 2019 | 1552 | No Data | 1552 |
| | 2020 | 1554 | No Data | 1554 |
| | 2021 | 1560 | No Data | 1560 |
| Offaly | 2018 | 0 | No Data | 0 |
| | 2019 | 160 | No Data | 160 |
| | 2020 | 1269 | No Data | 1269 |
| | 2021 | 1312 | No Data | 1312 |
| Westmeath | 2018 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2019 | 720 | 720 | 0 |
| | 2020 | 1502 | No Data | 1502 |
| | 2021 | 1540 | No Data | 1540 |
| Longford | 2018 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2019 | 230 | 230 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-------|------|---------|--------------|--------------|
| | 2020 | 624 | No Data | 624 |
| | 2021 | 632 | No Data | 632 |
| Louth | 2018 | No Data | 25 | 0 |
| | 2019 | No Data | approx 2,500 | approx 2,500 |
| | 2020 | No Data | approx 2,500 | approx 2,500 |
| | 2021 | No Data | approx 2,500 | approx 2,500 |
| Meath | 2018 | No Data | 32 | 0 |
| | 2019 | No Data | approx 3,000 | 1,650 |
| | 2020 | No Data | approx 3,000 | approx 3,000 |
| | 2021 | No Data | approx 3,000 | approx 3,000 |

CHO 9

The following is the response on behalf of Community Health Organisation Dublin North City and County.

| Dublin North West/ North City | 2 nd class | 6 th class |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2017/2018 school year | All children targeted | All children targeted |
| 2018/2019 school year | All children targeted | All children targeted |
| 2019/2020 school year | Approx 3800 outstanding | All children targeted |
| 2020/2021 school year | Approx 4200 outstanding | Approx 550 still to be targeted |

In line with government guidelines the HSE limited access to dental services during the pandemic. In line with national priorities, a number of staff were also redeployed to train as vaccinators in our Covid Vaccination Centres and this caused further delays in the delivery of routine dental examinations for the majority of children in 2nd class for the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school year. However during this period, emergency cases were offered an appointment.

Due to the unprecedented pressures of the service and the continued roll out of the vaccination programme, these children have not been placed on waiting lists and it is not planned to offer them an examination. Those children in 6th class who have not been yet targeted from the 2020/2021 school year will be offered an appointment.

| Dublin North | 2 nd class | 6 th class |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2017/2018 school year | All children targeted | All children targeted |
| 2018/2019 school year | All children targeted | All children targeted |
| 2019/2020 school year | Approx 3800 outstanding | Approx 1000 outstanding |
| 2020/2021 school year | Approx 4200 outstanding | Approx 4200 outstanding |

Similar to the above, it was not possible to target any 2nd class children for the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school year in Dublin North. However these children were seen, when necessary, as an emergency. Due to the current pressures on the service these children have not been placed on waiting lists and it is not planned to offer them an examination. Those children in 6th class who have not been yet targeted from the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school year will be offered an appointment in due course.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Joseph Green
AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations