



16th Dec. 2021

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: aengus.osnodaigh@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 59033/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to problems with the close contact notification system of the HSE in that it does not recognise foreign mobile numbers and therefore many migrant workers in factories around the country who often retain their home phone numbers could be oblivious of the fact that they may have been in contact with someone who had contracted Covid-19 and the need for them to have a PCR test themselves; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Ó Snodaigh,

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 Contact Management Programme (CMP) aims to deliver a patient-centred service, accessible, consistent and flexible to demand. The service takes into account the evolving needs and future potential service demands in the context of the evolving nature of disease transmission.

In terms of the Contact Tracing process, following receipt of a positive COVID-19 test result, Index Patients are asked to provide the details of their close contacts. These close contacts are subsequently notified of their potential exposure to the virus via SMS. In the first instance, these SMS notifications are sent from the Covid Care Tracker.

In October 2021, the Contact Management Programme successfully sent SMS notifications to close contacts from 53 countries. Therefore, the notification system does recognise foreign mobile numbers. The successful delivery of these messages is dependent on a range of variables, including the recipient's network coverage and device settings. Where an SMS has a delivery status other than 'delivered', Contact Tracers will attempt to establish contact via an outbound telephone call.

In November 2021, the CMP successfully notified a daily average of 3700 close contacts of their potential exposure to COVID-19. Our ability to notify close contacts is reliant upon the accuracy of the information provided by the index patient. Therefore, data quality is of the utmost importance and it's something that is proactively monitored and managed.

The Contact Management Programme employs a number of technical and organisational precautions. For example –

- Data validation in the COVID Care Tracker ensures that letters and special characters are not inputted in the phone number fields
- Contact Tracers have the option to use a HSE translation service where necessary
- Data quality is actively monitored and where necessary, additional training may be provided
- An outbound call may be placed to the index patient to validate the information given

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



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