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Deputy Pa Daly
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
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Re: PQ 41549/21 To ask the Minister for Health if he will report on the reason full Covid-19 data is not being published in particular the data on test numbers, positivity rates and data on Covid-19 cases in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Daly

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 reported epidemiology of COVID-19 and other notifiable infectious diseases is the responsibility of HSE-Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and is normally based on notification of cases to the Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting (CIDR) system. HPSC does not report data on test numbers or positivity rates.

On 14 May 2021 the HSE suffered a major cyber-attack on its IT systems. While HSE-HPSC and CIDR were not directly compromised by the cyber-attack, our surveillance partners (Departments of Public Health, laboratories, and others) were. Many had no access to even basic IT infrastructure and services for several weeks, reverting to keeping paper records. In addition, as a precautionary measure many HSE health information systems were shut down even if not compromised, including CIDR. For these reasons normal surveillance operations ceased.

The restoration of IT systems and access within the HSE was gradual. The necessary IT access to fully recommence notifications of COVID-19 to CIDR was reinstated in mid-July and was followed by a period of testing and resolution of any performance issues related to new IT security measures implemented since the cyber-attack.

As an interim measure after the cyber-attack, the reported daily number of COVID-19 cases was based on data uploaded to the HSE-CovidCare Tracker (CCT). As was highlighted in all published reports since the cyber-attack, these data did not represent notified cases. They had not undergone the extent of data validation which is undertaken by Departments of Public Health and HPSC. Due to limited data available on the CCT, it was not possible to report on hospitalised cases during this time period.

From 2 September 2021 onwards, HPSC reverted to reporting the daily number of cases notified to CIDR up to midnight the previous day and publishing a daily 14-day report. The daily 14 day report includes data on hospitalised cases. The daily 14 day report is published on the HPSC website www.hpsc.ie and are available at the following link <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casesinireland/>

COVID-19 data is subject to ongoing validation. While efforts continue to ensure the quality of the data for the period after the cyber-attack until normal surveillance activities were resumed, given the extent of the impact of cyber-attack on surveillance partners and across the health service, data for this period should continue to be interpreted with caution.

We would like to acknowledge and thank staff in laboratories, the Departments of Public Health and HPSC and other partners for their work during this period. Thanks to their flexibility and dedication much of the surveillance of COVID-19 continued with adapted methods despite the extremely challenging context posed by the cyber-attack. The retrospective notification of 75,000 cases for this period, while also responding to a 4th pandemic wave, was an unprecedented task and would not have been possible without the extraordinary commitment of all surveillance partners and supporting structures. We would also like to thank the HSE Contact Management Programme, the Office of the Chief Information Office, and Deloitte for their support during this period.

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

Yours sincerely,



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