



27 September 2021

Deputy David Cullinane  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 43096/21: To ask the Minister for Health the units by CHO or any smaller unit in which HSE dental services have been limited to emergency provision only for children and or adults for each month of 2020 and to date in 2021, as has occurred in County Kildare and west County Wicklow; if any other units are considering the confinement of services; the reason in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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

Following engagement with Community Healthcare Organisations (CHOs), the following outlines the current position;

#### CHO 1

Between the end of March, early April 2020, and the end of July 2020, due to the Covid -19 pandemic and acting under the guidance from the HSE's National Oral Health Office, routine dental services ceased in all locations. Small outlying service locations were closed with emergency care services being centralised to main centres only. Routine dental care services resumed in all locations from August 2020 and have continued incrementally to date.

Operational Area	Centres closed between March & July 2020	Centres for Provision of Emergency Care between March & July 2020
Cavan-Monaghan	Ballybay, Ballyconnell, Carrickmacross, Cootehill, Dental Surgery Cavan General Hospital*, Virginia (* dental surgery in designated acute Covid care area and is inaccessible to date)	Drumalee, Cavan Town, Dental Department Monaghan Hospital
Donegal	Ballyshannon, Donegal Town, Killybegs, Stranorlar, Glenties, Dungloe, Falcarragh, Creeslough, Lifford, Bunrana, Merville & Carndonagh	Dental Department, St. Conal's hospital, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

Sligo -Leitrim	Manorhamilton, Ballymote, Tubbercurry, Enniscrone, Drumkeeran, Drumshanbo, Mohill, Ballinamore	Markievicz House, Sligo & Carrick on Shannon Health Centre, Leitrim
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## CHO 2

The Dental Service operated emergencies only for the following periods: March 2020, April 2020, May 2020, June 2020. Following on from then, there was a slow resumption to an increased service from July 2020 to date with routine appointments being scheduled however, we have still not returned to full capacity / pre-covid numbers in clinic.

## CHO 3

Dental services in CHO3 were limited to an emergency service between mid-March 2020 and mid-August 2020 and, between January 2021 and mid-April 2021 due to Covid 19 restrictions.

In line with Infection Prevention and Control guidelines, ongoing national Covid 19 guidelines and Public Health guidance, full Dental services were restored between mid-August 2020 and the end of December 2020. Full Dental services again resumed from mid-April 2021. Dental services under General Anaesthetic (GA) have resumed in UL Hospital Limerick and UL Hospital Nenagh, however, due to staffing difficulties, GA Dental Services have not resumed at UL Hospital Ennis, Co. Clare.

## 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). A school screening dental service which targets pupils in 2nd and 6th classes is also provided across the area.

The emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020 required the health service to reorganise itself to develop a number of new services to respond to the pandemic. One such service was the community testing service, with sites established in four locations across Cork and Kerry. Core primary care staff, including a number of oral health staff, were trained as swabbers and redeployed to this service. Subsequently from March 2020 until June 2020 dental services operated on an emergency footing only. During the summer of 2020, due to low levels of referral for community testing, some primary care staff were able to return to core duties enabling the resumption of some services. However this resumption needed to be done in a safe manner, adhering to physical distancing and enhanced infection prevention and control measures. This reduced the capacity of the available staffing from what it would have been pre-COVID levels and it was necessary to target the available resources.

A national recruitment campaign initiated in September 2020, recruited a number of staff for the swabbing service, to enable the return of all primary care staff (including oral health staff) to core duties. However from January to March 2021 the significant surge in COVID-19 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of the pandemic resulted in an unprecedented level of demand for testing which necessitated the return of core primary care staff including oral health staff to swabbing and dental services were confined to an emergency provision only at this time.

In terms of present day and future plans, there are currently no plans to limit Primary Care dental services in Cork and Kerry.

## **CHO 5**

Dental Departments in South East Community Healthcare (which includes South Tipperary, Carlow/Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford) operated a limited service on an urgent care only basis from March 2020 in line with (i) national public health guidance (ii) redeployment of staff and (iii) occupational health recommendations that a number of clinical staff should remain at home.

From July 2020 non-urgent care resumed in line with the public health national guidance issued to dental services, however, a reduction in capacity has resulted due to changes to the work environment resulting from Covid-19.

## **CHO 6**

HSE dental services in Community Healthcare East were limited to the provision of Emergency Care only for adults and children from 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 until end of August 2020 due to Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions.

There are no plans at present to re-introduce similar limitations to care.

## **CHO 7**

Dental Services in CHO7 first moved to an 'Emergencies Only' model in March 2020, in response to Covid-19 Public Health and Safety Guidelines. As restrictions eased, scheduled treatments were reintroduced, however a situation has arisen in some areas where, due to capacity issues, Medical card holders are unable to access emergency dental treatment with DTSS contracted Dentists. The HSE Dental department has responded to this situation by offering emergency treatment to such patients. Whilst this situation currently exists in Kildare and West Wicklow, and Dublin South West, a similar response may yet be required in Dublin South City and Dublin West where difficulties with accessing treatment are being reported.

Below is a table which indicates, as requested the times when an Emergency Only model was in operation in the CHO.

Dental Emergency Service Only 2020 – see ✓											
Area	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	July 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Reason for offering Emergency Only Service
KWW	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓ Covid Response
DSW	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓ Covid Response
DSC	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓ Covid restrictions and staff redeployment
DW	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓ Covid restrictions and staff redeployment

Dental Emergency Service Only 2021 – see ✓										
Area	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	June 21	July 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Reason for Provision of Emergency Only Service
KWW						✓	*	*	✓	✓ Capacity redirected to Adult emergencies where treatment could not be secured via DTSS. * Adult and child emergencies prioritised, but other scheduled treatments available.
DSW						✓	*	*	✓	✓ Capacity redirected to Adult emergencies where treatment could not be secured via DTSS. * Adult and child emergencies prioritised, but other scheduled treatments available.
DSC	✓	✓								✓ COVID restrictions and staff redeployment
DW	✓	✓								✓ COVID restrictions and staff redeployment

## CHO 8

Dental services Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly confined service to emergency care only at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic March 2020. This was based on public health advice to protect our staff and patients. The emergency service was in operation throughout 2020 and was operated from bases at Portlaoise Health centre and Mullingar health centre.

Routine treatment for all the eligible population resumed in Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly in November 2020 in line with public health advice, national oral health office guidance and following the return of redeployed staff from testing and tracing. The service currently continues to provide routine services to all the eligible population.

Provision of elective care resumed in Louth Meath from May 2020, under the guidance of the National Oral Health Office. However, due to the fact that many dental staff continued to be redeployed, the services provided were still limited to mainly emergency treatment for children and special care patients, with elective care provided to priority groups, as defined by the National Oral Health Office.

The greatest threat to the ability of HSE dental services in Louth Meath to continue to provide elective care to children is the mass withdrawal of private dentists from the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) for adult medical card holders. This withdrawal was accelerated by the Covid pandemic, and has accelerated throughout 2021. Unless the provision of basic dental services to adult medical card holders is addressed urgently at the highest level, the HSE Louth Meath dental service may be forced to confine dental services to emergency treatment only, to the detriment of the oral health of both children and adults in particular those with special care needs.

## **CHO 9**

In line with Covid-19 guidelines issued by government, the Dental Service in Dublin North West / Dublin North City/Dublin North operated on an emergency only basis for children and adults with special needs from March 2020 to September 2020. The HSE Dental service is currently dealing with a backlog arising not only because of the pandemic, but also due to the current shortage of Dental Treatment Service Scheme practitioners seeing adult medical card holders. However there is no plan to confine the service to emergency only at this time.

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

Yours Sincerely,



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**Joseph Green**  
**AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations**