



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Cliniúil  
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**BY EMAIL ONLY**

**Deputy David Cullinane**

Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

14/09/2021

**PQ 43132-21 - Deputy David Cullinane - To ask the Minister for Health if he has engaged with the Minister for Education, the HSE and or higher education institutes to ensure that students on clinical placements in hospitals who opt not to be vaccinated can complete their placements without failing or repeating the previous academic year; if allowing students to have regular Covid-19 testing privately will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Cullinane.

The education and training of undergraduate students in healthcare disciplines within our model is based on a multi-stakeholder partnership involving patients, students, the Higher Education Institutes, the regulators of the professions and healthcare service providers including the HSE. Throughout the last academic year the HSE worked with the Higher Education Institute and other partners to ensure that clinical placements for students in the healthcare professions were facilitated through an exceptionally challenging year.

The HSE remains committed to working with key partners to support clinical placements for the coming academic year to the greatest practical degree subject to the priority of protecting the safety of patients, staff and students. In the context of an infectious disease that is now vaccine preventable, vaccination plays a key role in balancing the support for clinical placements with protection of the safety of all concerned. Given the importance of vaccination, the HSE will continue to promote vaccination and to provide vaccination free of charge to students intending to undertake clinical placements on the same basis as it provides vaccination to staff. The vast majority of students intending to go on clinical placement have accepted vaccination in the interest of protecting patients, their colleagues and themselves and we anticipate that this will continue. Vaccination against COVID-19 is voluntary in Ireland. The HSE is not seeking to impose vaccination on students.

There are a relatively small number of students that have not accepted vaccination. In a very limited number of cases this is because of a specific medical contraindication identified in the guidance published in the Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland. In a number of cases students have declined vaccination for other reasons.

In relation to staff who are not vaccinated because of a specific medical contraindication identified in the guidance published in the Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland or for other reasons the HSE applies a risk assessment process that is designed to protect both the staff member and the most vulnerable of patients from exposure to non-vaccinated staff to the greatest degree that is practical while maintaining services. The guidance on risk assessment is provided as an appendix to this document for information. The risk

assessment indicates that redeployment of some non-vaccinated staff to areas where the risk to them and to patients/service users is lower may be necessary for a period of time.

In relation the question about access to COVID 19 testing, as with any citizen, students are of course entitled to have regular COVID-19 testing privately if they wish to do so. This is not required as part of the HSE document with respect to clinical placements issued to the HEIs. Regular testing may have a limited role in reducing the risk that a student on placement may be infectious for patients, HSE staff and other students in that it may help to detect asymptomatic infection however it is not a substitute for vaccination. Regular testing of the student does nothing whatever to protect the unvaccinated student from acquiring infection when on placement. The HSE and the HEIs need to consider the safety of all involved. Any process based on preferential access to placement based on private testing would be inequitable as it would favour those able to pay for private testing. Any testing of personnel or students on placement that is required is provided by the HSE.

I hope this provides you with assistance.

Yours sincerely,



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Sharon Hayden  
General Manager  
Office of the CCO