



**28<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Deputy Gary Gannon  
Dáil Éireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 44193/21 “To ask the Minister for Health the hours for the HSE helpline for principals; and if he will extend the hours following issues arising from principals not being able to access timely communication.”**

**PQ 44194/21 “To ask the Minister for Health the current number of staff working on the dedicated helpline for school principals.”**

Dear Deputy Gannon,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

I wish to advise the current opening hours for the ‘HSELive Principal Phone line’ is 8am-430pm Mon-Fri and 10am-430pm Sat-Sun. The operating hours have not been extended as we have been advised that stakeholders are able to get through sufficiently and appropriate calls are being redirected to Public Health as advised. I wish to advise this line is specifically for school principals for specific Covid-19 related queries pertaining to a positive case in the school community. This line is managed by the HSE Covid-19 helpline. The HSE Covid-19 helpline has the appropriate flexibility to scale up or down staffing levels, on this line. This means that the number of agents available to take calls is constantly changing, in line with call demand. It is very important that to be effective, this dedicated resource for principals does not get overloaded with more general queries.

When the schools reopened earlier this month, there was increased demand on Departments of Public Health and in order to assist an expanded administrative team was established to assist with the schools response, with 80 additional staff put in place. They were onboarded to assist in verifying the details of close contacts and ensure people were informed in a timely manner. Following the decision by NPHET last week a policy change has occurred with regards the close contacts of a detected case in primary schools which has seen a reduction on demand to the Principal Line.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,

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**Niamh O'Beirne**  
**National Lead Testing and Tracing**

