

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

Deputy David Cullinane  
Dáil Éireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 46056/21 “To ask the Minister for Health if he will advise on a matter raised in correspondence (I had a COVID test yesterday in Waterford where every car was given a free box of 50 face masks. I’m horrified to see such a waste of money when the HSE is constantly running over budget. Surely the masks could be put to better use. Was it just in Waterford or in all test centres?); and if he will make a statement on the matter.”**

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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

Reflecting advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) guidance issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2021 provided the following recommendations on the use of face coverings:

- There are certain groups of people for whom the use of surgical face masks rather than cloth face coverings is now recommended by NPHE.
- Surgical masks rather than cloth face coverings are now recommended to be worn by people who are in vulnerable, high risk and very high-risk cohorts and older age groups when in crowded outdoor spaces or confined indoor community spaces. This is as an additional form of protection for the wearer against inhalation of or contact with infectious particles.
- In addition, it is recommended that surgical masks be worn by those people with a confirmed Covid-19 diagnosis during their infectious period, by those people who have symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 and those who are household contacts of confirmed Covid-19 cases. This is as a form of barrier to limit potential emission of infectious particles.

I wish to advise that persons who present for a Covid-19 test at Community Testing Centres have the option of taking a supply of surgical masks for these reasons as it allows for them, and their household contacts to have a supply of such masks available and to allow them to be able to be changed at the recommended frequency.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



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