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Deputy Richard O'Donoghue  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 18905/22: To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the extremely long waiting time that primary school children are forced to endure to receive orthodontic appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy O'Donoghue,

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.

Patients and their parents face difficulties in accessing orthodontic treatment with the HSE. These difficulties are expressed through the very high numbers waiting for assessment, and in both the numbers waiting for treatment and the length of time waiting for treatment. The predominant causative factor is lack of treatment capacity in the service.

Orthodontic treatment with the HSE Orthodontic Service is limited to those children with the most severe and complex orthodontic treatment needs. A Modified Index of Treatment Needs (Modified IOTN) system is used to determine if a child can be accepted for treatment.

Access to dental and orthodontic services was restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time many HSE orthodontic staff have been redeployed to testing and tracing as part of the HSE's response to the pandemic. This has resulted in significant losses in capacity and seriously affected routine orthodontic services.

The widespread Cyber Attack on the HSE system in Summer 2021 also had a significant negative impact on Orthodontic Services.

All service locations have implemented social distancing and other organisational measures as well as infection prevention and control guidance from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre that has been updated during the pandemic. Reducing waiting times is a key priority for the HSE, while at all times ensuring that services implement the organisational measures required.

National Initiatives underway to address Orthodontic waiting lists include:

- Orthodontic Procurement: The total number of patients transferred from the HSE to private providers under the Framework Type Agreement (3983) from 2016 to 2020 inclusive is 1996 patients. The HSE is currently placing patients in the successor to Framework 3983 (11317), and have allocated a further 1154 patients in treatment with private service providers by the end of Q1 2022.
- Recruitment of additional Consultant Orthodontist and Specialist Orthodontists
- Proposed recruitment and deployment of Orthodontic Therapists.
- Prioritisation of care: All orthodontic services prioritise the provision of care for those patients identified as having the greatest needs and the highest risk of developing dental disease.

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**