



Office of the Director of National Health Protection,
National Health Protection Service,
HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre,
25/27 Gardiner Street,
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To : Deputy Bernard J Durkan TD.
E. bernard.durkan@oireachtas.ie

10th January, 2023

PQ 61624: To ask the Minister for Health the extent to which the prevention of infectious diseases continues satisfactorily; and if he will make a statement on the matter. **Bernard J. Durkan**

Dear Deputy Durkan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the above parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have consulted with the National Clinical Programme for Infectious Diseases (NCPID) and the Surveillance Lead and Director, Health Protection Surveillance Centre in preparing this response.

Infectious diseases are illnesses caused by harmful agents (pathogens) that get into your body. The most common causes are viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites. Infectious diseases usually spread from person to person, through contaminated food or water or through insect bites. Some infectious diseases are minor and some are very serious. From a Public Health perspective, the control and prevention of infectious diseases often requires a cross sectoral and whole of society response. While there is often no single way to prevent infectious disease, there are many simple ways to reduce our risk of infectious disease and even prevent certain illnesses altogether. These include vaccines, handwashing, safe food handling, cleaning and disinfecting.

All medical practitioners, including clinical directors of diagnostic laboratories, are required to notify the Medical Officer of Health (MOH)/Director of Public Health (DPH) of certain notifiable infectious diseases. This information is used to investigate cases thus preventing spread of infection and further cases. The information is also used to monitor the burden and changing levels of diseases, which can provide the evidence for public health interventions such as immunisation. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is Ireland's specialist agency for the surveillance of communicable diseases. HPSC is part of the Health Service Executive and works in partnership with health service providers and sister organisations in Ireland and around the world, to provide the best possible information for the control and prevention of infectious diseases. HPSC strives to protect and improve the health of the Irish population by providing timely information and independent advice, and by carrying out disease surveillance, epidemiological investigation and related research and training. HPSC provides information on infectious diseases to the public and develop guidance for staff.

Infectious Disease (ID) services are an integral component of medical care at the 12 hospitals where infectious disease services have been resourced, notably Beaumont Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda, St. James' Hospital, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, St. Vincent's

University Hospital, Cork University Hospital, Mercy University Hospital Cork, Galway University Hospital, University Hospital Limerick (currently no permanent consultant in post but one post appointed and incumbent commencing in second half of 2022), Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore, University Hospital Waterford and Tallaght University Hospital (consultant recently appointed and taking up post imminently). The range of services provided to patients includes inpatient and outpatient clinical services relating to complex infectious diseases and general internal medicine.

Infectious Disease (ID) physicians have assumed a leading role in management, quality improvement (QI) and medical education related to infection diagnosis and management. Clinical sites adhere to a similar model of care, as much as is possible, realising the diverse nature of infectious diseases.

The National Clinical Programme for Infectious Diseases (NCPID) was formally established in November 2020. A working group (WG) and Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) have been established, with representation from each of the clinical Infectious Diseases (ID) sites in the HSE. To date, the main focus of work includes:

1. COVID-19. The National Clinical Programme for Infectious Diseases (NCPID) Clinical Leads have assumed leading roles in crisis management and strategic planning during the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. This has required ongoing review and appraisal of the COVID-19 literature and COVID-19 policies in both Ireland and abroad and is based on a robust understanding of viral pathogens, infection prevention and control (IPC), public health, and clinical care provision. The NCPID Clinical Leads have contributed significantly to National Bodies including Expert Advisory Group (EAG), National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC), HSE Antigen Groups, Therapeutics Advisory Group (TAG) and HSE COVID-19 treatment guidelines. NCPID clinical leadership has also been instrumental in the ongoing roll-out of the Long Covid service around Ireland and chair the Therapeutics Advisory Group (TAG) that develops the guidelines to inform the roll out of novel therapeutic agents for treatment of COVID 19.
2. Workforce planning document which led to the establishment of new ID services in Tallaght University Hospital (TUH), University Hospital Waterford (UHW) and Tullamore, with pending appointment of a consultant in Sligo University Hospital and in Connolly Hospital. 3. The NCPID team has been working to carry out an assessment of health needs and regional ability to provide infection-related care to Ukrainian refugees.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have a specific Infectious disease, disease type query or wish to provide further context to your question, we would be happy to assist in providing further information.

Yours sincerely,



**Joan Gallagher, Programme Manager,
National Health Protection Service, HSE HPSC**