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**05 April 2022**

**Deputy Gary Gannon  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2**

**PQ 9758/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of 1st, 4th and 6th class primary school children respectively on waiting lists to access the schools dental screening programme to year end 2021 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter..**

Dear Deputy Gannon,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Routine dental services are targeted at certain age groups, and use school class as part of the targeting of services, therefore the academic year can be a factor in reporting progress of targeted programmes. In many instances, information is not held in a format that facilitates the response to the question.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the response is based on the information available allowing for limitations in the way data is collated in CHOs / local areas. The response is presented on a CHO basis with detail from each of the constituent dental areas where applicable, and as outlined there are limitations in that regard.

Emergency dental treatment is available to all children aged up to and including 15 years.

#### **CHO 1**

The Dental Service for children operates as a targeted, school-linked service, whereby children in specific primary school classes are targeted for an oral health assessment and for primary care treatment arising there from. The provision of this service is a statutory requirement for the HSE. The service does not currently keep waiting lists of school children beyond the target class being assessed at any particular time. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and available resources only 6<sup>th</sup> class children were targeted in 2020/2021. The service will shortly begin to offer appointments to the 6<sup>th</sup> class of 2021/2022, it is unlikely that any other class will be currently targeted in 2021/2022.

Academic school year	1st	4th	6th
2019/2020	1532	1659	242
2020/2021	1599	3325	713
2021/2022	1495	2177	3570

## CHO 2:

Galway, Mayo and Roscommon (Community Healthcare West) response:

Academic School Year	2nd Class	4 <sup>th</sup> Class	6th class
2017/2018	172	486	27
2018/2019	44	583	
2019/2020	4800	5700	1000
2020/2021	5700	5700	1012
2021/2022	5740	5750	3500

Please note that the Dental Service operated emergencies only for the following periods, March 2020, April 2020, May 2020, and June 2020. Following on from then, there was a gradual resumption to an increased service from July 2020 to date, with routine appointments being scheduled, however the service has still not returned to full capacity / pre-Covid numbers in clinic.

## CHO 3

HSE Dental Services in CHO3 provide routine dental examinations to school going children when they are in the 'target classes' i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> class and 6<sup>th</sup> class when they are in Primary School. Children outside of these 'target classes' experiencing dental pain can attend a HSE Dental Clinic where the presenting dental problem will be treated as an emergency.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic a backlog has occurred for children in the 'target classes' being called for their routine dental examination. This has occurred due to the pausing of the service for a number of months in 2020 in line with government restrictions and Infection Prevention Control (IPC) guidelines and also dental staff being redeployed to the Covid 19 testing and vaccination programmes. When the service resumed, it did so in line with the restrictions and guidelines in place which meant a reduction in numbers attending dental clinics which has had a 'knock-on effect' on the list of patients waiting to access the service. In CHO3, the HSE Dental Services are currently working through the school lists for the academic year 2020/2021 and it will be approximately 18 months before all children from these lists will be called for their routine dental examination. The table below outlines the number of children waiting to be seen for their routine dental examination by academic year:

Academic School Year (CHO3)	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	4 <sup>th</sup> Class	6 <sup>th</sup> Class
2020/2021	5300	n/a	5582
2021/2022	5400*	n/a	5600*

\*These figures are estimated based on the anticipated number of consent forms which will be returned on behalf of this cohort of children.

#### **CHO 4**

The Primary Care Dental Service provides dental treatment to eligible children, medical card holders, adults and children with special needs and others in the care of the HSE at various locations throughout Cork and Kerry. Children under 16 years of age are treated in HSE dental clinics and adults are treated by private dental practitioners contracted to the Health Services under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS).

Due to the COVID pandemic, and the consequent redeployment of dental staff to community testing, the school dental screening program was suspended for a period of months in both 2020 and 2021.

The suspension of the service due to COVID had a significant impact on the service and the school screening programme is close to 18 months behind schedule in Cork and 24 months behind schedule in Kerry. The cyber-attack on the HSE had a further detrimental impact on the service.

As a consequence the service is currently prioritising only one class, the children in 6<sup>th</sup> class (12 years or over), in our school screening programme until we deal with 6<sup>th</sup> class backlog.

The service continues to prioritise our special care needs patient cohort. There is also an emergency service available to any child under 16 who is suffering from acute or chronic dental pain and infection.

The approximate numbers of children in 6<sup>th</sup> class waiting for a dental examination are:

#### **Cork**

2020/2021 – 3,900

2021/2022 – 7,700

#### **Kerry**

2020/2021 – 2060 (currently screening)

2021/2022 – 2096

#### **CHO 5**

Children in target classes are considered to be waiting for assessment and treatment from the 1st of September when they enter the target class. Therefore those waiting in the 2021/2022 classes are waiting since September 2021 and are now waiting almost 7 months, those in the 2020/2021 target classes are now waiting 19 months. Although 3 classes are targeted i.e. 2nd, 4th and 6th, when resources are limited 4th class is given lower priority, which is why they are waiting longer. Some of the figures for 2021/2022 have not been returned from schools yet so these may be an underestimate.

### Wexford/Waterford Dental Area

Academic School Year	2nd/1st class	4th class	6th class
2017/2018	0	4255	0
2018/2019	2448	4234	690
2019/2020	3973	4196	4423
2020/2021	3895	4149	4354

### South Tipperary/Carlow/Kilkenny

Academic School Year	2nd/1st class	4th class	6th class
2017/2018	0	2284	0
2018/2019	0	2239	0
2019/2020	1091	2927	1039
2020/2021	2460	3361	2812
2021/2022	2871	3164	3284

### CHO 6

- I. Children not offered a screening appointment attending National Primary Schools

Academic School Year	2nd class	4 <sup>th</sup> class	6th class
2017/2018	Nil	4,517	Nil
2018/2019	Nil	4,677	Nil
2019/2020	4,915	4,880	Nil
2020/2021	4,763	4,920	Nil
2021/2022	4,645	4,780	4,697

- II. Children attending Private Primary Schools in CHO6 are not offered appointments in the school-screening programme. There are no recent numbers available for this cohort, the most recent data collated relates to the 2016/2017 school year.

Private Schools CHO6 2016/17	2nd Class	4 <sup>th</sup> Class	6th class	Total
	416	439	523	1378

### III. Children in Special Schools/Special classes in National Schools\*

<b>Under 16</b>	<b>Over 16</b>
428	25

\***DSE and DL only:** Unfortunately due to extended staff absence on leave, it has not been possible to include data for Special Schools in Wicklow LHO in this response.

#### CHO 7

Where waiting lists are held for some patient cohorts, information cannot be filtered by age. Waiting list not maintained for 4th classes as these classes are not targeted.

The following information is available:

Academic School Year	No. on 2nd Class waiting lists	No. on 6th class waiting lists	Time delay at 1.3.22
2019/2020	3612	1102	30 months
2020/2021	8134	7333	18 months
2021/2022	9322	9422	6 months

#### Steps:

All possible and reasonable steps are being taken within the Dental service, but it is not possible to ensure that the assessments are provided in a timely manner. Delays are unavoidable. The main steps being taken are to prioritise services and cease to offer non priority services such as oral health promotion in the community and in schools, and to progress recruitment to vacant posts.

#### CHO 8

The Public Dental Service Midlands/ Louth Meath provides a targeted service in line with priorities set out by the National Oral Health Office (NOHO). The ability of the service to meet these priorities is based on available resources. In light of available resources, the Public Dental Service Midlands/ Louth Meath, prioritises and targets adults and children with special needs, the schools dental programme targets only those children in sixth class national school and provides emergency care to children outside of target classes up to and including 15 years of age.

In meeting the above targets, and as a result of COVID-19 pandemic with associated staff redeployment and more recently the national HSE cyber-attack, the service is currently two years behind in calling sixth class pupils for examination and necessary treatment.

Below table detailing waiting lists for children in current priorities groups;

	<b>Louth</b>	<b>Meath</b>	<b>Longford/Westmeath</b>	<b>Laois/Offaly</b>
6th class 2019/2020	0	804	0	1391
6th class 2020/2021	946	2802	1112	1531
6th class 2021/2022	2639	2856	2413	1369

### **CHO 9**

<b>CHO DUBLIN NORTH CITY COUNTY</b>			
<b>Academic School Year</b>	2nd Class/ 7 years	4th Class/9 years	6th Class/12 years
<b>2019/2020</b>	7,000	9,000	NIL
<b>2020/2021</b>	9,000	9,000	1,500
<b>2021/2022</b>	8,000	9,000	6,000

### **Background to the data provided above for the period before March 2020:**

Most of the classes were visited and completed. However, 4<sup>th</sup> class were not seen as it was anticipated Dublin North City and County would be unable to provide a service. The second school year affected was 2020/2021 and only 6<sup>th</sup> Class were visited and completed.


By the end of 2021 there are approximately 6000 6<sup>th</sup> class children waiting however, prior to the pandemic 1500 would have been eligible for an examination in September 2020, six months approximately post COVID-19 commencing.

Children in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class have not been assessed and they have been waiting since the commencement of the school year.

As advised above, the dental service in Dublin North City and County are prioritising 6<sup>th</sup> class and will screen additional classes should resources allow. The Dental Services would normally have examined children in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes. Since the onset of the pandemic, Dublin North has only been able to see and treat 6<sup>th</sup> class.

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**