



**Priscilla Lynch**  
**Head of Service, Primary Care,**  
**Cork Kerry Community Healthcare,**  
**Coolnagarrane, Skibbereen, Co. Cork**  
**Email: [Priscilla.Lynch@hse.ie](mailto:Priscilla.Lynch@hse.ie)**

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Ms Holly Cairns, TD,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ ref 2604/22**

**“To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure adequate HSE dental appointments are available to children in south-western areas of County Cork.”**

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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

The Primary Care Dental Services team provides dental treatment to eligible children, medical card holders, special needs clients and others in the care of the HSE at various locations throughout County Cork. 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). People who are categorised as high risk, for example: people with specified medical conditions, or special care needs adults, can avail of more extensive dental care.

The emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020 has had a significant impact on the provision of all health services including dental services throughout the Cork and Kerry region. As per our pandemic plan, the HSE Dental Service had to curtail service provision to emergency services only and staff were largely redeployed into COVID testing, contact tracing and the vaccination programme. The school dental screening program was suspended from March 2020 to September 2020 and again from January 2021 to March 2021. This has led to significant delays in the service delivery.

While most oral health staff have now returned to core duties enabling the safe resumption of services, strict adherence to physical distancing and enhanced infection prevention and control measures has reduced the capacity of the available staffing from what it would have been pre-COVID and it is necessary to target the resources available.

The dental service continues to prioritise special care needs patients and medically compromised patients. The service also continues to provide emergency care for all eligible patients.

There is currently a reduced service in Cork South-West due to staffing issues. However, a recruitment process is now underway and we expect another dental surgeon to be based in West Cork in the near future, once the recruitment process is completed by the HSE Recruitment Department.

In addition there are particular issues with the HSE dental service for adults i.e. the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). This issue is a nationwide problem and is not unique to Cork

South-West. A significant number of private general dental practitioners (GDP`s) have resigned from the Scheme and many of the general dental practitioners still operating the scheme have restricted access and are seeing existing patients only. Therefore, some medical card patients must currently travel to towns outside of their location to access dental treatment. We are continuing to provide patients with the names of general dental practitioners who continue to operate the scheme.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

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