



**08 August 2022**

**Deputy Thomas Gould  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2**

**PQ 40705/22: To ask the Minister for Health the classes to which school dental visits are offered in all counties other than counties Cork, Cavan and Monaghan. -**

Dear Deputy Gould

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.

Dental Services for primary school going children are provided in line with the 1970 Health Act, subsequent Acts and regulation. Services are organised and delivered by the HSE's Dental Service in line with Department of Health policy and are carried out in HSE Dental Clinics. Access to emergency treatment for the relief of pain and sepsis is through local dental clinics. Routine dental services for primary school going children are delivered through a targeted approach with a strong emphasis on the prevention of oral disease. Referral for treatment in secondary care settings are also made from the HSE Dental Service.

The 1994 Dental Health Action Plan states that *'Children in specific classes, usually 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes are targeted for preventative measure under the school based approach'*. Children in the targeted age groups are typically seen in 1st/2nd Class (7-8 year olds) and 6th Class (11-13 year olds), with some 4th Class (10 year olds) children being seen in some parts of the country.

Appendix 1 details KPI data from end 2021 and to date 2022 on the number of new oral health patients in target classes attending for scheduled assessment per CHO and dental area. This data is not available per county as requested.

Since the emergence of Covid-19, there has been a significant increase in delays in accessing routine treatment for those in target classes. This has resulted in backlogs emerging in the targeted schools programme. The scale of disruption to services nationally in 2020 meant that attendance for dental examinations by children was reduced to 36.5% of 2019 activity, while in 2021 the comparable attendance was 54.5% of 2019 activity.

Throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, including in 2022, the HSE responded to a number of emerging problems, including testing capacity, contact tracing and the implementation of updated infection prevention and control guidance. Each of these has involved the HSE Dental Service, with extensive redeployment for testing and contact tracing, as well as for the mass vaccination programme. In some locations, access to clinical facilities was reduced due to repurposing for pandemic-related activities. The cyberattack on the HSE system in summer 2021 also had significant impacts on Dental Services.

While most oral health staff have now returned to core duties enabling the safe resumption of services, Covid-19 continues to impact on service provision for patients and staff.

As part of targeting of resources, each dental service maintains a commitment to urgent/emergency treatment for the relief of pain, infection, and the sequelae of trauma. All children in targeted classes are offered dental examination, with individual care plans based on each child's needs. For routine and preventive services, patient groups are prioritised with children and adults with special care needs given the highest priority, followed by children in 6th class. Where service deficits are identified locally, clinical teams can be redirected to address those needs.

The extent of the backlog in targeted services and delays in providing preventive interventions and treatment for patients are concerns for the HSE, with services working to reduce the backlog in treatment appointments. Delays in assessments may reduce opportunities for preventive measures as disease is not identified early. Levels of scheduled examinations improved to 65% in early 2022, but significant backlogs in treatment remain.

A number of Community Health Organisations have run recruitment initiatives to fill vacancies that have arisen or may arise for dentists, dental nurses and dental hygienists. Plans for service developments which will enable the service address delays in treatment caused by the curtailment of services during the Covid-19 pandemic and improve access to services for children in target classes are being developed as part of the 2023 Estimates process.

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**



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**Appendix 1: KPI Data on Total No. of new Oral Health patients in target groups attending for scheduled assessment**

\*The total number may reflect children in targeted classes who are seen outside the designated school year.

CHO Area	Dental Area	No. of new oral health patients in target group 6-8 years of age /1st or 2nd class attending for scheduled assessment End 2021	No. of new oral health patients in target group 6-8 years of age /1st or 2nd class attending for scheduled assessment 2022 to date	No. of new oral health patients in target group 11-13 years of age / 5th or 6th class attending for scheduled assessment End 2021	No. of new oral health patients in target group 11-13 years of age / 5th or 6th class attending for scheduled assessment 2022 to date	*Total No. of new Oral Health patients in target groups (1st/2nd, 4th and 6th class) attending for scheduled assessment End 2021
<b>CHO 1</b>	<b>Total</b>	2,540.0	840	4,902.0	3010	13,800.0
CHO 1	Cavan Monaghan	333.0	0	718.0	787	3,135.0
CHO 1	Donegal	1,009.0	664	1,860.0	1667	5,286.0
CHO 1	Sligo Leitrim	1,198.0	176	2,324.0	556	5,379.0
<b>CHO 2</b>	<b>Total</b>	1,148.0	148	3,255.0	2258	6,156.0
CHO 2	Galway	293.0	66	665.0	238	1,486.0
CHO 2	Mayo	279.0	4	1,282.0	728	2,057.0
CHO 2	Roscommon	576.0	78	1,308.0	1292	2,613.0

<b>CHO 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	1,666.0	1372	1,364.0	1627	4,153.0
CHO 3	Clare	590.0	462	532.0	485	1,307.0
CHO 3	Limerick	268.0	137	429.0	516	1,283.0
CHO 3	North Tipperary East Limerick	808.0	773	403.0	626	1,563.0
<b>CHO 4</b>	<b>Total</b>	138.0	90	933.0	7728	8,552.0
CHO 4	Kerry	138.0	90	933.0	953	1,188.0
CHO 4	North Cork	N/A	N/A	N/A	1723	1,494.0
CHO 4	North Lee	N/A	N/A	N/A	2431	2,791.0
CHO 4	South Lee	N/A	N/A	N/A	1912	2,233.0
CHO 4	West Cork	N/A	N/A	N/A	709	846.0
<b>CHO 5</b>	<b>Total</b>	2,895.0	1940	2,861.0	1371	11,973.0
CHO 5	Carlow Kilkenny	1,212.0	520	1,203.0	443	3,418.0
CHO 5	South Tipperary	686.0	560	675.0	501	3,737.0
CHO 5	Waterford	557.0	462	535.0	182	2,972.0
CHO 5	Wexford	440.0	398	448.0	245	1,846.0
<b>CHO 6</b>	<b>Total</b>	42.0	3	3,538.0	2035	6,743.0
CHO 6	Dun Laoghaire	42.0	3	3,538.0	2035	6,743.0

<b>CHO 7</b>	<b>Total</b>	3,401.0	1934	2,492.0	1994	12,059.0
CHO 7	Dublin South City	596.0	551	734.0	620	2,363.0
CHO 7	Dublin South West	907.0	707	559.0	170	2,860.0
CHO 7	Dublin West	1,340.0	578	620.0	846	3,561.0
CHO 7	Kildare West Wicklow	558.0	98	579.0	358	3,275.0
<b>CHO 8</b>	<b>Total</b>	1,335.0	174	1,593.0	1564	6,124.0
CHO 8	Laois Offaly	9.0	8	863.0	512	2,188.0
CHO 8	Longford Westmeath	1,326.0	147	730.0	706	2,633.0
CHO 8	Louth	0.0	2	0.0	260	709.0
CHO 8	Meath	0.0	17	0.0	86	594.0
<b>CHO 9</b>	<b>Total</b>	1,873.0	2250	5,144.0	2457	12,999.0
CHO 9	Dublin North	17.0	19	1,155.0	1036	2,828.0
CHO 9	Dublin North Central	354.0	463	1,178.0	493	2,561.0
CHO 9	Dublin North West	1,502.0	1768	2,811.0	928	7,610.0