



24th November 2022

Deputy Gino Kenny,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: gino.kenny@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 55177/22

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the reason that a large number of Covid-19 swabbers currently employed in testing centres face lay-offs in late November 2022; the exact numbers planned for lay-offs; if these staff, who worked throughout the pandemic, will be redeployed elsewhere; if he will intervene to ensure that these frontline workers are kept on the payroll over the Christmas period given the likely surge in Covid-19 cases and the need for such trained staff in the coming months; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kenny,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question that has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

The long-term plan for Covid-19 is to manage it in a similar way to other respiratory diseases, which is through a Surveillance and Clinical Model in primary care. This long term model will be supported by the National Ambulance Service (NAS) who will support emerging threats, one of which includes a potential future surge in demand for Covid-19 testing.

The overall transition to this long-term model began earlier this year, as the criteria for testing changed based on Public Health guidance, and Community Testing Centres moved to smaller facilities as demand reduced significantly. A review has been recently undertaken to determine the model for testing from November 2022 as we evolve to complete the full transition of the service to the long-term model. In the near term, Community Test Centres will continue to operate in order to maintain the required level of capacity within the overall system, which includes a surge capacity beyond the actual demand. These will be managed by Community Testing staff and NAS. As the demand has reduced significantly, approximately 84 WTE Community Testing staff were given notice that their contracts within the Community Testing service would cease on 21st November 2022.

HSE Managers are linking with staff who expressed an interest in continued employment with the HSE, regarding potential suitable roles for which they can apply or may be reassigned into based on funded vacancies to be filled in the system currently. It is intended that there is no disruption to pay for the staff who are reassigned to other roles. The managers are working with HR and payroll to put measures in place so that staff will continue to be paid, and to attend to it promptly should any issue arise with staff payroll.



Please see below status as of 24th November 2022:

- 7 WTE returned to substantive post in HSE;
- 51 WTE accepted reassignment to continue with HSE after 21st November 2022;
- 18 WTE staff resigned from their post in HSE;
- 8 WTE staff- their contract with HSE terminated.

HSE managers are continuing to explore opportunities and bringing these to the attention of staff.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eileen Whelan".

Eileen Whelan
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme