



24<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Deputy Róisín Shortall,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: [roisin.shortall@oireachtas.ie](mailto:roisin.shortall@oireachtas.ie)

**PQ Number: 55221/22**

**Question: To ask the Minister for Health if he will respond to matters raised in correspondence (details supplied) from a person working in a Covid-19 testing centre; if he will outline the current situation in respect of the employment of staff carrying out Covid-19 tests in HSE centres across the country; if all staff in COVID-19 test centres will have their contracts extended; if not, the rationale for such a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**-Róisín Shortall**

*Details Supplied:* I work as a Covid swabber in a Dublin CHO. We have known for a while that testing was wrapping up over the winter months and have been told we would be redeployed into other areas of the HSE. Last week we were told that our jobs are to end on the 21st of November. This is problematic for a few reasons and plain unfair for a few others. The unfairness being that there are around 150-180 swabbing staff left in the country. About 100 of those have had their contracts extended until January 23rd and the remaining 50-80 are being let go on November 21st, a month before Christmas. The problematic part of it is that we have been told from above that they will 'try' for redeployment. We are aware there are very little jobs for us to fill. Even if they do find jobs for us all, they were informed by payroll not to redeploy anyone before Christmas as even with a smooth transition into a new job, our paperwork would take at least six weeks to process, meaning we would not get paid between late November and mid-January. Management have given us assurances that they would push wages through but they also did the same in June when Covid testing was downsized and our colleagues redeployed elsewhere. The average time then between payments was from late June to mid-August. We all feel this is desperately unfair and plain mean behaviour on people who were at the forefront of Covid testing before much was known about the virus and no vaccines were available. Whether we are let go or transferred before Christmas, we will not get paid for six weeks from late November. We hoped you might use your position to shed light on this and perhaps ask why half of the Covid testers in the country are getting one final two month extension while less than the other half are being left high and dry before Christmas

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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 21 November 2022.

Following a detailed evaluation, CHO Community Testing staff will be retained until end of January 2023 in CHO2 (West), CHO4 (South and South West), CHO5 (South East), CHO9 (Dublin North City and County) and in Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim in CHO1. The contracts for CHO Community Testing staff in other areas – CHO3 (Midwest), CHO6 (East), CHO7 (Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow), CHO8 (Midlands, Louth-Meath) and in Cavan and Monaghan in CHO1, will cease from 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022.

This decision was informed by a range of factors including geographical considerations, synergies with NAS capacity and the current retained CHO Community Testing staffing levels including the availability of staff to support independent management of test centres, all the while working within the staffing numbers approved to be retained.

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 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022:

- 7 WTE returned to substantive post in HSE;
- 51 WTE accepted reassignment to continue with HSE after 21 Nov 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,

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**Eileen Whelan**  
**National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme**