



24th November 2022

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: fergus.odowd@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 55532/22

Question: To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide clarity on reports that Covid testing services in counties Louth and Meath will cease from 22 November 2022; the plans to deal with expected surges in winter Covid numbers, given that the National Ambulance Service is already under-resourced to adequately deal with such large numbers of testing in the large populations' centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy O'Dowd,

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, including those in Louth and Meath in order to maintain the required level of capacity within the overall system, which includes a surge capacity beyond the actual demand. The test centres in Louth and Meath will be operated by the NAS emerging threats team in the short term until full transition of the service to the long-term model. Additional NAS posts have been approved and recruitment is already well advanced regarding same.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Whelan
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme