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**23 February 2023**

**Deputy Bernard Durkan  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2**

**PQ 5505/23: To ask the Minister for Health the extent to which school medical examinations continue on time in all areas throughout the country including Kildare North; the degree to which adequate follow-up takes place; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

***Further details: Please note deputy is referring to dental appointments.***

Dear Deputy Durkan,

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.

The HSE Dental Services are provided through 17 Dental Areas, all of which continue to provide routine services. The dental service prioritises treatment for people with special care needs, those who are medically compromised and provides emergency care for all eligible patients.

These services are delivered with a strong preventive ethos in order to minimise the incidence of dental disease in vulnerable populations. In particular this preventive approach involves the delivery of personalised oral health promotion for children and people with special care needs. Children are seen at ages that correspond with dental developmental milestones to identify opportunities for timely preventive interventions such as fissure sealants and the need for restorative treatment, as well as monitoring the eruption of the permanent dentition including possible orthodontic anomalies requiring referral for HSE orthodontic assessment.

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 2022, but significant backlogs in treatment remain.

Appendix 1 details KPI data for the Dental Service by Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) and Local Health Office (LHO) end 2019 to end 2022. The LHO Kildare/West Wicklow is highlighted in yellow for ease of reference. I wish to advise the Deputy it is not possible to provide data specific to Kildare North as referenced in the question. The reported metric is the number of new oral health patients in target groups attending for scheduled assessment.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



**Joseph Green**  
**AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations**



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**Appendix 1: No. of new Oral Health patients in target groups (1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class) attending for scheduled assessment (2019 – 2022)**

CHO	LHO	Q4 2019	Q4 2020	Q4 2021	End December 2022
<b>National Total</b>		<b>151,392</b>	<b>55,324</b>	<b>82,494</b>	<b>99,367</b>
<b>CHO 1</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>19,266</b>	<b>9,129</b>	<b>13,800</b>	<b>13,637</b>
CHO 1	Cavan Monaghan	5,116	3,571	3,135	4,250
CHO 1	Donegal	8,321	2,659	5,286	7,187
CHO 1	Sligo Leitrim	5,829	2,899	5,379	2,200
<b>CHO 2</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>12,145</b>	<b>2,904</b>	<b>6,156</b>	<b>7,073</b>
CHO 2	Galway	4,317	531	1,486	895
CHO 2	Mayo	3,690	1,264	2,057	2,027
CHO 2	Roscommon	4,138	1,109	2,613	4,151
<b>CHO 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>11,632</b>	<b>3,385</b>	<b>4,153</b>	<b>6,125</b>
CHO 3	Clare	4,148	1,481	1,307	1,784
CHO 3	Limerick	2,544	963	1,283	1,528

CHO 3	North Tipperary East Limerick	4,940	941	1,563	2,813
<b>CHO 4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20,641</b>	<b>8,086</b>	<b>8,552</b>	<b>15,350</b>
CHO 4	Kerry	3,419	1,277	1,188	2,344
CHO 4	North Cork	4,105	1,710	1,494	3,252
CHO 4	North Lee	5,175	2,027	2,791	4,725
CHO 4	South Lee	6,369	2,415	2,233	3,763
CHO 4	West Cork	1,573	657	846	1,266
<b>CHO 5</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>18,638</b>	<b>6,621</b>	<b>11,973</b>	<b>12,484</b>
CHO 5	Carlow Kilkenny	4,992	1,690	3,418	3,075
CHO 5	South Tipperary	6,239	2,485	3,737	4,259
CHO 5	Waterford	3,919	1,608	2,972	2,909
CHO 5	Wexford	3,488	838	1,846	2,241
<b>CHO 6</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,143</b>	<b>4,054</b>	<b>6,743</b>	<b>5,678</b>
CHO 6	Dun Laoghaire/ Dublin South East/Wicklow	8,143	4,054	6,743	5,678
<b>CHO 7</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>25,180</b>	<b>9,534</b>	<b>12,059</b>	<b>15,151</b>
CHO 7	Dublin South City	3,175	1,627	2,363	3,456
CHO 7	Dublin South West	5,242	2,136	2,860	2,812
CHO 7	Dublin West	5,420	2,014	3,561	4,446

CHO 7	Kildare West Wicklow	11,343	3,757	3,275	4,437
<b>CHO 8</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>17,842</b>	<b>3,829</b>	<b>6,124</b>	8,581
CHO 8	Laois Offaly	3,154	720	2,188	1,902
CHO 8	Longford Westmeath	4,317	875	2,633	2,212
CHO 8	Louth	5,547	1,100	709	1,812
CHO 8	Meath	4,824	1,134	594	2,655
<b>CHO 9</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>17,905</b>	<b>7,782</b>	<b>12,999</b>	15,288
CHO 9	Dublin North	7,419	2,456	2,828	4,562
CHO 9	Dublin North Central	2,676	2,003	2,561	2,845
CHO 9	Dublin North West	7,810	3,323	7,610	7,881