



Oifig Náisiúnta Sláinte Béal,
Áras Phlásóg na Rós Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
An Pháirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta, Caladh an Treoigh, Luimneach
Tel: 061 492068
E: nationaloralhealth@hse.ie
National Oral Health Office
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park, Castletroy, Limerick
Tel: 061 492068
Email: nationaloralhealth@hse.ie

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**Deputy Mattie McGrath
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2**

PQ 9839/25 To ask the Minister for Health if the lack of dental services for autistic children in the south east can be urgently addressed; the number of children with autism waiting on dental services in Cork, Tipperary, Waterford and Kilkenny; the average waiting time in each area; the efforts being made to address the waiting lists; and if she will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy McGrath,

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.

HSE Community Dental Service supports patients who have additional needs in attending for routine dental care and preventive support to maintain their oral health. Children with autism may be identified to our service either through our targeted school programme or as part of service for patients with additional needs. Each of these service areas are provided with available resources. Many children with additional needs are able to cooperate with dental examinations and/or treatment. The service may identify patients with additional needs as needing operative care but is unable to cooperate without the assistance of some level of sedation. A decision to provide that care under 'waking' sedation or full general anaesthetic is prompted by either the patient's ability to cooperate or the level of treatment required.

The Department of Health has supported 15 WTE additional new posts, specifically to improve staffing levels within the HSE Community Dental Service. The Chief Officer and REOs have identified 34.7 WTE vacancies in 2024 across oral health services nationally, to be prioritized for filling. The Department of Health is supportive of recruitment to the 49.7 WTE identified through these two processes, which will improve the staffing levels currently available to provide service.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the data is not available as requested. Patient data is not recorded as requested and a report on the number of children with autism waiting on dental services is not available.

The HSE's 2025 National Service Plan aims to continue to develop services and implement waiting list initiatives across a range of dental and orthodontic services and maximise activity across these services to manage waiting lists and waiting times.

The service plan supports the implementation of the Government's National Oral Health Policy, Smile Agus Sláinte, including the development of comprehensive oral healthcare packages for roll-out to children aged from birth to seven years of age.

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

Yours Sincerely,

Anne O'Neill
Assistant National Director, Oral Health