



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta  
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,  
Baile Átha Cliath 20, D20 HK69

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Deputy Mark Ward.  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

14<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**PQ Number: 50340/23**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the average waiting times from date of referral to actual first time appointments in CAMHS for routine, urgent and emergency appointments, in tabular form; for a breakdown of these waiting times per CHO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Mark Ward**

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Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

HSE Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide specialist mental health services to those aged up to 18 years, who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorder that require the input of multi-disciplinary mental health teams.

#### **Referral and Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

Community CAMHS teams will provide a timely response to all referrals received. As per the CAMHS Operational Guideline (COG), when a referral is received from the list of approved referral agents it is screened by a member of the CAMHS team, such as the Team Coordinator, in consultation with the Consultant Psychiatrist. Referrals are screened daily during working hours (Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.) All new referrals are discussed at a weekly team meeting. If the referral form does not include adequate information, the CAMHS team may contact the referral agents and other relevant contacts such as parent(s), schools and HSE Primary Care services to ask for additional information. This information can be used to best inform levels of risk, need and functioning in different settings. Consent must be obtained from the parent(s)/guardians prior to contacting other agencies. When a referral has been screened, it is then categorised into:

1. Emergency
2. Urgent
3. Routine
4. Not appropriate for CAMHS



### **Emergency Referrals**

During office hours CAMHS Community Teams operate from Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. CAMHS Community Teams can be contacted during these hours to discuss emergency referrals in consultation with the Consultant Psychiatrist. They can provide advice and consultation when the emergency or crisis is due to a diagnosed or suspected mental disorder.

Outside of these hours, or in an emergency situation where no Community CAMHS Team is available, it is advised that the emergency services are contacted or that the child or young person is brought to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital to access a mental health assessment. In many areas of the country a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist is on call 24 hours and can be contacted by the Accident and Emergency services if required. Where this is not currently available a child and adolescent can access a mental health assessment through the Emergency Department and be referred, if required, as priority to the Community Team on the next working day.

### **Urgent Referrals**

An urgent referral is one where there is a clear and present level of acute symptoms of mental disorder and where there is a strong likelihood of considerable deterioration in mental state if left untreated. Urgent referrals should be responded to within three working days of receipt of referral and seen as soon as possible based on clinical risk. CAMHS teams need to have a mechanism to respond to urgent referrals on a daily basis within working hours (Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.) This can be done, for example, by the Team Coordinator or the Consultant Psychiatrist or through a triaging function. Responding to an urgent referral may mean the direct involvement of the CAMHS team or it may mean, for example, telephone consultation with the parent(s) or other agencies to organise an appropriate response to the referral agent.

### **Routine Referrals**

A routine referral is one where there are clear and present levels of acute symptoms of moderate to severe mental disorder which have been ongoing but can be managed in the short-term by the child or adolescent's support network (i.e. parent(s) or other agencies). Routine referrals should be seen within 12 weeks or sooner depending on service demands. Responding to a routine referral means that a letter is sent by the CAMHS team to the child or adolescent and their parent(s) to offer them an initial assessment appointment. An initial letter should be sent within 2 weeks of referral receipt and should include the following:

- Acknowledgment of the referral.
- Indication of whether the referral has been deemed an urgent or routine referral.
- Estimated waiting time for the first appointment or contact from the CAMHS team. Information on how waiting times may go up or down depending on the demand in the area should be included.
- A list of local community supports and/or useful websites to access while they are awaiting their appointment, including HSE's [www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)
- Advice of what to do in an emergency or if the child or adolescent's presentation worsens.

A copy of the letter should also be sent to the GP/Referral Agent.

The HSE do not collect waiting time data for routine, urgent or emergency appointments. Each referral is risk assessed by the CAMHS Team and seen based on clinical priority.



Further information on referral and access to CAMHS can be found by consulting with the CAMHS Operational Guidelines. Please see below:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs/operational-guideline/camhs-operational-guideline-2019.pdf>

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Braham', written over a light blue horizontal line.

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**Paul Braham**  
**Senior Operations Manager (Area DON)**  
**National Mental Health Services**