



23rd November 2020

Deputy Mick Barry
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 33480/20 Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to ensure that all contacts are traced within the 3 day recommended timeframe of a positive diagnosis; the measures he undertook to ensure all contact tracing operations have adequate resources including telecommunications and IT equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Barry,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

I wish to apologise for the delay in issuing a response to your above question.

Due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and the numerous queries we have received to date it has taken longer than I would've liked to respond.

Contact tracing is a normal part of a public health response to any infectious disease. In the non-Covid era, this activity is managed by specialists in public health medicine, in the eight Public Health departments around the country. Due to the scale of the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE established the Contact Management Programme (CMP) to provide additional capacity for contact tracing. In addition, the HSE developed the Covid Care Tracker system to support the contact tracing activity, and data collection.

Contact tracing involves contacting the person who gets a laboratory confirmed positive result (the case) and everyone they have been in contact with since 48 hours before their symptom onset (close contacts). Since March there have been a variety of system and process improvements designed to improve both the timeliness and quality of the contact tracing calls. I have included these below:

- Contact tracing operates seven days per week from 8am until 8pm.
- Contact tracing centres operate around the country (currently five locations) reducing the risk of a Covid outbreak impacting capacity.
- Laboratory results are uploaded to the Covid Care Tracker every hour from 8am until 9pm, seven days per week. This improves the timeliness of results notification and contact tracing.
- Confirmed cases receive an SMS message as soon as their result is loaded onto the Covid Care Tracker, and in advance of receipt of a contact tracing call. This ensures they know their result as soon as possible.
- All close contacts of confirmed cases receive an SMS message advising them that they are a contact of a confirmed case as soon as their details are entered onto the Covid Care Tracker, and requesting that they restrict their movements. This ensures that contacts restrict their movements as quickly as possible and ahead of the contact tracing call.
- As part of the national Test and Trace system, the HSE is developing standing capacity for contact tracing, with 800 tracers being recruited.



- While recruitment is underway, there are 550 people recruited to date, the HSE has some redeployed staff and also civil and public servants have been supporting contact tracing. Since mid-October there have been at least 700 people available to support contact tracing.
- The Contact Management Programme has a very well developed and public health lead training team that ensures all contact tracers receive the appropriate level of training before making calls to the general public.
- The Covid Care Tracker system has undergone multiple software releases to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the process.
- The HSE has a suite of performance measures, against which each stage in the pathway from referral for a test to contact tracing completion is measured.
- The HSE monitors performance on a daily basis, and the median time to complete all contact tracing calls is currently 0.8 of a day and the average is 0.9 of a day. This means we contact the index case, gather all their contacts and arrange testing for all contacts in this timeframe, which is currently below our target since 26 October. Our target is less than one day.
- We make contact with 94% of close contacts – which exceeds targets set by ECDC and WHO.
- Our overall metrics from Referral to end of Tracing is 1.7 days for Community swabs.

There will always be a percentage of cases or contacts who are not contactable, or for whom incorrect contact information is available. The HSE seeks to continuously improve our data capture and our contact tracing completion, so as to have the maximum impact on the virus.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing