

7th December 2020

Deputy Alan Kelly
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 38819/20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the contingency plans in place for the test and trace system here in the event that there is a withdrawal of labour by an association (the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association) due to its outstanding pay claim and his refusal to engage on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Kelly,

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

The HSE Test and Trace programme uses a network of laboratory facilities to support the national pandemic response. This network is a collaboration of both Acute Hospital and Community Laboratory providers. Laboratory professionals are an important resource in this overall model and play a vital role in supporting the National Programme.

As part of the HSE's Test and Trace contingency planning process a range of strategies to manage service disruption are in place. These strategies are adapted to take account of a range of scenarios, which includes any issues that might impact on the service. Strategies may include the use of alternative facilities and associated resources depending on the scale and scope of the impact. Clearly no contingency plan can cover all possible situations nor deal with every possible scenario that might arise where the contingency plan as to be activated. We continue to monitor our contingency plan on a regular basis to ensure it mitigates the risks as best we can for the various situations.

I am aware of wider concerns raised by the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association (MLSA) and understand that the HSE are in active discussions with the MLSA on these issues. I would hope that these issues will be resolved through those discussions and that there will be no impact on COVID-19 testing services.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing