



Minister seeks action on COVID-19 testing pressures

Date published: 08 September 2020

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Health Minister Robin Swann has contacted Secretary of State for Health Matt Hancock in relation to issues facing the National COVID-19 testing system.

Mr Swann is seeking action on a number of concerns, including the UK-wide online booking system that has been offering some people in Northern Ireland tests in Great Britain.

COVID-19 UPDATE

"To be clear, no one in Northern Ireland is expected to travel outside the jurisdiction for a test. These slots have been offered by the online system because it has not on occasions recognised local requirements. The same problem has been reported in Scotland.

"I want to see this glitch resolved as a priority.

"I have also emphasised the need to urgently build capacity for the National testing programme."

Mr Swann continued: "The National system has undoubtedly come under pressure in recent days, due to significantly rising demand. These are linked at least in part to the re-opening of schools.

"I need to again appeal to the public to use the service responsibly. Online bookings are made by self-referral but that does not mean they are open to all.

"Tests are solely for those who have symptoms or have specifically been referred for a test by the Contact Tracing Service."

The symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature); OR
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual); OR
- a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.

Mr Swann added: "While I totally understand the continuing high levels of public concern about COVID-19 – particularly from parents and schools – we must protect the testing system so that it is available for those who need it.

"Common cold symptoms outside of a cough, fever or loss of/ change to sense of taste or smell do not require a test.

"The reopening of schools is a vital priority which I fully support. It has brought serious pressures for schools, parents and children, as well as the testing system.

"We can get through these pressures by working together collectively and following public health advice.

"That includes each of us continuing to do everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19."

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