

17 Kildare St.,
Dublin 2.
9th December 2020

Mr Leo Varadkar TD,
Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
23 Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Mr Varadkar,

ISME held its final National Council meeting of 2020 yesterday, 8th December. One issue raised consistently by Council members from widely differing business sectors was that of the risk of a rapid rise in Covid-19 infection rates after the Christmas holidays. This concern arises in two broad areas: Irish workers welcoming home friends and relations from abroad for Christmas, and non-national workers returning home for Christmas.

The latter problem is more acute in certain sectors, particularly the services sector. As you know, the current Labour Force Survey¹ estimates that almost 16% of the workforce is non-national, and 6% of the total is from EU15 - EU27 countries. Significant numbers of these EU15 – EU27 workers are employed in the care, hospitality, construction, manufacturing, and logistics sectors. The latest ECDC data² show very significant infection rates in many of these countries, with the 14-day cumulative cases per 100,000 in excess of 1,000 in four member states as of this morning.

Large numbers of these workers have booked leave between 18th December and 3rd January and are expected to return home. It is inevitable that many employers and their employees will be worried upon the return of these workers to the workplace from January 4th. The purpose of this note is twofold:

1. We request that immediate provision be made for rapid Covid-19 testing of in-bound air and sea passengers to Ireland from January 1st.
2. We further request that employers be empowered and assisted in providing rapid Covid-19 testing at the workplace for employees returning to work in the first week of January.

We do not believe that the current PCR testing regime is either affordable or operationally appropriate for the scale of testing that these requests would necessarily involve. We believe that a campaign of rapid testing in the workplace after Christmas, with the immediate isolation of suspected positive cases, would greatly mitigate any increase in the Covid-19 caseload in the New Year.

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurvey/lfsquarter32020/>

² <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea>

While we appreciate that fulfilling the requests above entails the cooperation of Government Departments beyond your own, the net issue is primarily one of workplace health and safety, and requires amendment of your Department's Return to Work Safely Protocol.³

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil McDonnell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Neil McDonnell
Chief Executive

CC Minister of Health Stephen Donnelly TD
Minister of Transport Eamon Ryan TD
Minister of State Damien English TD
Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General DETE
Mr Declan Hughes, Assistant Secretary General DETE

³ [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#)