

Covid-19

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS COVID-19 PANDEMIC - STUDENTS - MINISTRY OF EDUCATION - TESTING TEAM (19.04.2022)

(No. B/348) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard of the testing team for educational institutions created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, she will state –

- (a) the number of tests carried out as at to date, indicating the number of students positive tested, and
- (b) if same is still operational.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to inform the House that a testing team was constituted by my Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness to conduct Rapid Antigen Tests on students upon detection of a positive case within the classroom, and to advise schools on infection prevention and control protocols.

The team of 91 Trainee Nurses followed a training programme on Rapid Antigen Testing and infection prevention and control, which was organised by the Ministry of Health and Wellness in collaboration with the World Health Organisation. They have been clustered in 31 education testing teams and posted as from 10 April 2022 in 28 educational institutions which acted as education testing team base.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that 40,920 Rapid Antigen Tests have been carried out since the start of the testing exercise from 10 February 2022 up to 15 April 2022. A total of 1,505 students have been tested positive in the pre-primary, primary, secondary and Special Education Needs (SEN) institutions.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the Education testing team will continue their assignment until further notice.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. We commend the idea of setting up the testing team for the welfare and safety of our school going kids. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether any evaluation or appraisal of the work done by the testing team has been carried out with the view to improving its efficiency? Because as at now, hon. Minister, the time gap before the testing team actually response to requests made by the school is lengthy. Will the hon. Minister see to it that the response time can be faster?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, initially, the testing was done on all the students within the classroom. But following the protocol from the Ministry of Health and Wellness; we have come down to the students around the person who is detected positive and therefore, the number has gone down; the number of tests carried out. However, I must say that, if initially there was a delay because there was some time of adaptation required for the team to start working, towards the end of the term, we have noted that the time taken was very much reduced.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request the hon. Minister to inform the House about the Scheme of Service of the members of the testing team? May we know, for example, whether they report to the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, they have got to report to the Ministry of Health and to the Ministry of Education as well. And I can even give the duties of the testing team. So, the testing team comprises a Team Leader who oversees the collection of the test samples; distributes the collection kits and swabs; serves as a point of contact for communication; oversees the site set up and enforces test procedures; ensures that students are tested on the correct days, because we started having the test on the first day and then the third day, and eventually we came to the test being carried out solely on the third day. And they are responsible to register the test takers, ensure that consent has been signed by parents prior to the testing; explain the testing results; log entries and test results; number of tests used; and full details of positive results. And then, we have a Test Administrator who provides instructions on the Rapid Antigen Tests, administers the tests and performs test analysis on samples. They also have the responsibility of disposing the testing kits in collection bins.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister inform the House - because initially we know the testing team is for kids; will the testing team in the future, in the short-term or long-term carry out tests for teaching and non-teaching staff as well?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, initially as mentioned by the hon. Member, the testing team was meant solely for the students but whenever the exposure of a teacher to the student exceeds the two hours that have been prescribed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the test can be carried out. We are very positive for that.

Dr. Gungapersad: One last question. Hon. Minister, in the short term or long term, is the Ministry planning to review the scheme of service of the testing team so that they carry out other health-related exercises, for example, in the prevention of chronic diseases or contamination?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my initial answer, I had mentioned that they were responsible for carrying out the tests but also to help the schools to set up the infection prevention protocols. They have been trained for that as well.

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WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS COVID-19 - DROP-OUTS CASES - EDUCATION SYSTEM (05.04.2022)

(No. B/201) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the education system, she will state if consideration will be given for the carrying out of a survey to assess the number of children at primary and secondary levels having dropped out therefrom since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

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YEAR 2022

MATTERS RAISED

PFIZER VACCINE – 5 to 11-YEAR OLD CHILDREN – INOCULATION (29.03.2022)

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I shall raise the issue of COVID-19 vaccines for children 5 to 11-year old to which I shall require some clarifications from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some countries around the world are inoculating the Pfizer vaccine to children 5 to 11-year old. In Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we heard from the hon. Minister in a Press conference on 30 January this year that a consignment of vaccines shall be available in April this year, that is next month. Apart from that, the population has not been provided with additional information as to whether it will be mandatory to all children and if not whether not being vaccinated, access to school will be denied or specified places would be barred as is the case for non-vaccinated elderly. I shall request the hon. Minister if he can enlighten the House and the population on this issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister please!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning the vaccines for children, so far, Pfizer, the company, has sent us the contract that we have to sign with them but we have not got further information on when Pfizer will be delivering us the vaccines for the children. In January, they stated that it would be in March, but so far we have not got any further information on that.

Concerning if ever we will start inoculating children and whether it will be mandatory for them, so far nothing has been decided. But I believe that this would not be the case because the vaccines will be offered to children and then obviously with the consent of parents but no decision has been taken up to now. The Vaccination Committee is still working on that and once we receive the vaccines first, then that will be decided.

