

IEMAG**Minutes of meeting – Wednesday 17th June 12pm**

Attendees: Philip Nolan (Chair), Alan Cahill, Ann Barbar, Breda Smyth, Brendan Murphy, Cathal Walsh, Chris Brunson, Conor Keegan, Conor Teljeur, David McEvoy, Francis Butler, Guy McGrath, James P Gleeson, Jamie Madden, Jim Duggan, Justin Gleeson, Maire Connolly, Máirín Ryan, Malachy Corcoran, Patrick Wall, Simon More

Apologies: Ajay Oza, Alan Barrett, Darina O’Flanagan, Megan O’Driscoll, Sean Lyons

Secretariat: Sarah Glavey, Katie O’Brien, Martha Purcell

Working Group Updates

- Working Group 1: Age cohort model and statistical detections of early warnings to continue to be the focus of work. PN has reached out to ABM colleagues at TU Dublin, response outstanding.
- Working Group 2: PN updated IEMAG that he has shared a letter with the CMO recommending that the work of WG2 be paused given that their work has been completed. WG2 will remain linked to IEMAG and available to remobilise if necessary.
- Working Group 3: OSI are working on a public version of the internal dashboard. This will be launched later this week

Data updates

- CIDR geocoding and early warning data: PN to discuss with director of HPSC the possibility of getting the data geocoded quicker and more clearly.
- Anonymised aggregated statistical data on mobile phone network utilisation: the Dept. Health has secured a dataset for a two-month trial period for the purpose of advising NPHET on the COVID19 response.

Research

- The group discussed research areas of interest:
 - Mining contact tracing (project proposal drafted by SM)
 - Epidemiology of COVID-19 in HCW
 - Broader significance in children (child to child and child to adult transmissibility)
- PN and SM to discuss the possibility of taking on an epidemiology programme of work beyond what is already committed to around parameter estimation
- AC is working to confirm a process with the CSO for researchers who may request the use of the COVID-19 data.
- Ethics approval should be sought through the temporary National Research Ethics Committee (NREC) for COVID-19 which was established to deliver an expedited process for review for all COVID-19-related research studies.

Work programme for IEMAG

IEMAG discussed the future work programme:

A. Enhanced modelling:

- Develop an age-cohort model (with objective around children)
- Preliminary exploration around more granular modelling

B. Epidemiological studies:

- Mining contact tracing (project proposal drafted by SM)

- Epidemiology of COVID-19 in HCW
- Broader significance in children

C. Scenarios and simulations:

- MC to initiate work on scenarios of second wave or “cluster control” with JD
- Proposal is to draft 5/6 scenarios (e.g. impact of flu season). Level of detail and number of scenarios to be confirmed.

D. Monitoring and early warning:

- Exploration of datasets that may signal an early warning
- Investigate metrics used by other countries e.g. in South Korea if the number of new cases pass 50 for 2 weeks, or the cause of transmission is unknown for greater than 5% of cases, an urgent response is warranted
- Geospatial analysis

E. Sustainable collaboration:

- We now know the value of epidemiology monitoring and modelling, therefore there is an argument for a sustained capacity in the system.
- Consider how to sustainably continue the modelling work that is being done and make recommendations around future capacity of this work and other elements relating to health service research.
- Can the group input into strategic thinking around health services research?
- Explore if the DOH or HSE have an interest in using the models developed to monitor other infectious diseases. If they do, consider how best to operationalise
- Data hub will remain important going forward

F. Geospatial analysis:

- Capturing incidence and risk geographically for NPHE
- Time-space series and how disease spreads over time

G. Recommendations

- IEMAG to share recommendations (e.g. evidence synthesis, biostatistical analysis, data linkages etc) where body of work lies outside the scope of IEMAG or requires significant resources

H. Healthcare demand and capacity modelling

- IEMAG work to be paused on healthcare demand and capacity modelling
- Working group 2 can be remobilised if necessary

I. Other work to consider:

- Additional cohorts: Third level students, and considerations regarding their return to university, particularly about international students
- Testing: Assess impact of flu season on demand for testing, considering who might we deploy
- Excess mortality: There are multiple issues with cross-country comparisons. In addition, it is too early to estimate - we need 12 months of data first.

Open discussion on IEMAG perspectives on Testing and Facemasks

PN opened to the floor to discuss the group’s perspective on testing and use of facemasks

- Testing:

- There is a distinction between diagnostic vs screening use
- Clarity regarding purpose of surveillance at different phases is helpful in terms of changing activities driven by that
- Identifying emerging clusters quickly is important
- A two-page technical note may be helpful to state position (e.g. maintaining low levels of disease, clamping down on outbreaks, cohesive EU approach)
- We need to be able to ramp up testing capacity if required
- Could redeploy testers for seroprevalence screening
- Need to prioritise testing on the basis of consequence
- Face coverings
 - WHO guidance demonstrates that there is a benefit to facemasks in specific cohorts if used properly
 - Communication is key – key public figures need to be seen wearing masks
 - A key element is the ability to turn on/off usage and reinforce message (use in public transport and retail are important)
 - PN and MR to reinforce message at NPHET
 - Concept of compliance fatigue to be put to behavioural sub-group

Actions:

- PN to discuss with HPSC the possibility of getting the data geocoded quicker and more clearly.
- PN and SM to discuss the possibility of taking on an epidemiology programme of work beyond what is already committed to around parameter estimation
- AC is working to confirm a process with the CSO for researchers who may request the use of the COVID-19 data and will update IEMAG
- KOB to consider how to assess impact of flu season on demand for testing, considering who might we deploy
- A two-page technical note may be helpful to state position of COVID response objective (e.g. maintaining low levels of disease, clamping down on outbreaks, cohesive EU approach)
- PN and MR to reinforce message about facemasks at NPHET
- Concept of compliance fatigue to be put to behavioural sub-group
- PN to work with secretariat to formalise work programme

Next Meeting: TBC