



Mr. Stephen Donnelly TD,
Minister for Health,
Department of Health,
Miesian Plaza,
50-58 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2.

24 July 2020

Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health

Dear Minister,

I write further to yesterday's meeting of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). The NPHET agreed a *Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response* which I am pleased to enclose.

Part 1 of the Framework introduces the rationale for its development which is to set out a strategic approach to Ireland's future response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction recognises that Ireland must now plan for responses to the pandemic that are sustainable in the long-term but also sufficiently flexible to adapt to the evolving status of the disease. The purpose of the Framework is to set a direction for responses during different Phases of the pandemic. Critical to the Framework, and to continuing to successfully manage the COVID-19 disease, is that key stakeholders must now prepare their own national, regional or local level plans for response which will be aligned with the priorities identified in the Framework and informed by their own expertise. Each stakeholder will be accountable for the development of those plans and for their delivery when required.

The Framework categorises the status of the COVID-19 disease according to four Phases:

In the Blue Phase the disease has effectively been eliminated and the pandemic is declared over.

The Yellow Phase reflects the current status of the disease in Ireland. In this Phase there is low incidence of disease with isolated clusters and low community transmission. The key response during this phase is to plan and prepare for Phases with higher levels of disease and to maintain preventative actions so as to continue to suppress transmission of the virus.

The Orange Phase represents a time of increasing incidence of disease with multiple clusters and increased community transmission. During this phase, robust responses may be required to contain clusters of the disease and public health measures may be necessary at a local, regional, national and/or sectoral level.

The Red Phase represents the time when the risk is greatest as there is high or rapidly increasing incidence, widespread community transmission and the pandemic is ongoing and escalating rapidly. During this Phase, the introduction of public health measures at a national level will be required in order to minimise the number of cases, morbidity and mortality that COVID-19 is capable of causing and to protect the capacity within the hospital system.

Part 2 of the Framework describes the key considerations that underpinned its development. The Framework was guided by ethical principles with a particular focus on the protection of the most vulnerable. Proposed future responses to COVID-19 will be public health led, risk-based, incremental and will be introduced in a phased and stepwise manner. Finally, there is recognition of the importance of continuing to build on the positive transformation seen within our health and social care services over the next number of months.

Part 3 sets out the lessons learned from the experience of the pandemic to date which will inform future responses. A critical lesson about the disease is that the novel nature of the virus means that learning from emerging evidence remains a priority. Lessons learned about our response to the disease include that no single body or organisation can manage the disease on its own; each individual has a part to play to suppress transmission, that a combination of public health measures is more effective than any single measure, that suppressing the disease in the wider community is necessary to protect those most vulnerable and that rapid identification and isolation of new cases is essential.

Part 4 sets out areas of focus for the future. These include a recognition that risks to future successful management of the disease include compliance fatigue from members of the public, the continuing risk of importation of the disease from overseas and the co-circulation of influenza and COVID-19 this coming winter. In the health and social care services, areas of focus will include the necessity to support and expand the workforce to meet demand, the need to provide non-COVID care alongside COVID care, a focus on how long term care facilities might be organised differently and, most importantly, continuing to prioritise the optimisation of the care of residents in those facilities to protect them from COVID-19.

Part 5 sets out the intended Communication and Engagement strategy for the future of the pandemic including the principles and objective of that strategy and an outline of its content.

The remainder of the Framework is composed of a series of outline priority actions for the Public, for the Health and Social Care sector and across Government and Society which are organised according to the Yellow, Orange and Red Phases. Responses under the Framework can occur at the micro-level of localised outbreaks, the meso-level of regional or sector specific outbreaks and the macro-level where a national response is required. The Framework is not intended to capture every possible action that might be taken during different levels of the disease as it recognises that the precise set of measures utilised at any time will be informed by the profile of the disease and the underlying context of transmission at that time. For members of the public, the Framework provides guidance on actions that can be taken, both individually and collectively, in response to differing levels of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland. For those in the Health and Social Care sector and in Government and Society, the Framework sets out indicative actions to take and provides outline priorities to guide the development of specific plans for response to the different Phases of the pandemic.

I understand that this Framework will now form part of considerations ongoing across Government over the coming days so that Ireland can continue to successfully manage our response to the COVID-19 disease.

I would be happy to discuss further, should you wish.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Ronan Glynn

Acting Chief Medical Officer

Chair of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team

cc. Ms Elizabeth Canavan, Department of the Taoiseach and Chair of the Senior Officials Group for COVID-19