



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

30<sup>th</sup> October 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 (NPHE).

The NPHE reviewed the latest epidemiological data and the following key points were noted:

- A total of 6,058 cases have been notified in the seven days to the 28th October, compared with 8,231 in the previous seven days, representing a 26% decrease.
- The 7- and 14-day incidence rates are 127 and 299 per 100,000 population respectively; these compare with last week's 7- and 14- day incidence rates of 173 and 303 per 100,000 population respectively.
- Nationally, the 7-day incidence as a proportion of 14-day incidence is at 42%, demonstrating that there has been less cases in last 7 days compared to preceding 7 days.
- The 5-day average of reported cases is 843 cases per day; this compares with a 5-day average of 1,205 cases per day on the 22nd October.
- 67% of cases notified in the past 14 days have occurred in people under 45 years of age; the median age for cases notified in the past 14 days is 32 years.
- The 14-day incidence in those aged 65 years and older has increased from 190 per 100,000 population on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October to 204 per 100,000 population on the 29th October.
- The estimate of current growth rate for the country is 4.9% (compared with 6.9% on the 20<sup>th</sup> October), with a doubling time of 14 days. The growth rate is lower in Dublin at approximately 3.5% and higher in the rest of the country at 5.9%.
- Over the past week, the trajectory of the disease in Dublin has differed from the national picture. Daily case counts and 14-day incidence rates in Dublin have remained stable in recent days.
- Based on data to the 29th October, the best estimate of reproduction number (R) for the country is approximately 1.0. R is likely to be at, or slightly greater than, 1.0 in Dublin.
- A total of 106,124 tests were undertaken in the last seven days. The 7-day average test positivity rate has decreased from 7.1% to 5.5% over the last seven days. The positivity rate yesterday, 28th October, was 5.9%. It was noted that these data must be interpreted with

caution as this indicator is dependent on factors including the proportion of tests arising from serial testing programmes on a given day/week.

- There are currently 318 confirmed COVID-19 cases in hospital, compared with 310 on 22nd October. There have been 21 new admissions in the preceding 24 hours.
- There are currently 41 confirmed cases in critical care, compared with 35 on 22nd October. There have been 4 new admission in the previous 24 hours.
- To date, there have been 84 deaths notified with a date of death in October. This compares with 5 and 36 deaths notified (to date) with a date of death in August and September, respectively. 32 of the 84 deaths that have occurred in October are associated with nursing homes.

Further relevant information includes:

- 680 additional new clusters were notified in the past week to 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020. There are 3,545 open clusters nationally. Of these, 51 open clusters are associated with nursing homes and 25 open clusters are associated with hospitals.
- In the week to midnight 26th October (week 43), there were 16 new clusters notified in nursing homes/community hospitals with 361 linked cases and 5 new clusters in hospitals.
- A range of mobility data suggest that current measures have resulted in reduced mobility in the population in recent weeks.
- The average number of close contacts has decreased from approximately 5-6 per confirmed case at the end of September to the current level of 2-3. The average number of close contacts per confirmed case started to decline in the days prior to implementation of Level 3 restrictions in Dublin, perhaps due to anticipatory behaviour in the population.
- The current 7-day incidence in Northern Ireland is 332 cases per 100,000 population.

The NPHET also considered the epidemiological situation across Europe and noted the following:

- The average 7-day incidence across EU/EEA and UK countries is 241 per 100,000 population, this compares with 169 per 100,000 in the previous 7-day period.
- As per data reported by ECDC on 28th October 2020, Ireland ranks 17th out of 31 EU/EEA and UK countries in relation to 14-day incidence rates/100,000 population. In terms of the 7-day incidence rate, the epidemiological situation in Ireland compares favourably to EU/EEA counterparts - there has been a 20% decline in the 7-day incidence rate in Ireland in the last week compared to the previous week, while the majority of countries in the EU/EEA/UK are experiencing an upward trend.
- The most recent ECDC Rapid Risk Assessment, dated 23rd October, highlights that *'all EU/EEA countries and the UK have implemented various non-pharmaceutical interventions, but these have not been fully successful in controlling transmission, and the epidemiological situation is now rapidly deteriorating. Implementing stricter non-pharmaceutical interventions, which proved to be effective in controlling the epidemic in all EU/EEA countries and the UK during spring 2020, appears to be the only available strategy that may have a moderate (as opposed to high) impact on the disease for individuals and healthcare provision. This results in an overall assessment of the general population being at high risk.'*
- The rapidly evolving landscape in relation to restrictive measures, where significantly more restrictive measures have been introduced or proposed in a number of European countries

over the last week. This includes stay-at-home recommendations and/or overnight curfews, limits on numbers of individuals that may gather in indoor and outdoor settings as well as mixing of households, and restrictions or closure of the hospitality sector and other non-essential services.

The NPHET noted that a range of indicators are showing improvement over the last week, including daily case counts, 7 and 14-day incidence rates, the growth rate, the R number, the positivity rate, the average number of close contacts per confirmed case and indicators of mobility. However, while there is some indication that growth in numbers of COVID-19 patients in hospital and intensive care may be starting to decrease at population level, these indicators of disease severity remain a significant concern. Hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths are likely to increase further given the known lag effect with these indicators. Of particular concern, notwithstanding the overall decrease in case numbers and incidence rates in the general population, incidence rates in the older age groups (65 years and older) continue to increase, and disease burden in this population can be expected to translate into increased hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths.

It was also noted that there hasn't been the same level of improvement in the absolute numbers of cases and incidence rates in Dublin as that observed elsewhere in the country, with the volume of cases remaining high. While there was an initial improvement in the profile of the disease in Dublin following the application of Level 3 measures in mid-September, this was not sustained with case numbers increasing approximately two weeks after the move to Level 3 and remaining consistently high.

Overall, the NPHET concluded that the trends over the last week are broadly positive and should give encouragement that the efforts being made across society to adhere to public health measures are having an impact. However, the NPHET emphasised that these latest trends should be interpreted with caution and, at this point in time, it is not possible to draw substantive conclusions about the trajectory of the disease. There are a number of factors that may be influencing the decrease in case numbers over the last week, including the restriction on visits to homes nationally and the move to Level 4 in Border counties from 16th October, and anticipatory behaviour in advance of implementation of Level 5 measures from the 22<sup>nd</sup> October. While it is too early to see any direct impact of Level 5 restrictions, the additional effect of these measures will become evident over the next two weeks. The NPHET emphasised that this is only the beginning of efforts to reverse the trajectory of the disease and strongly encourages the population to remain vigilant and to sustain individual and collective efforts to further reduce transmission and bring the number of cases and force of infection to very low levels.

The NPHET again noted the areas that will require further consideration and development to support the easing of restrictions and it will give these matters close consideration in the coming weeks. These include:


- further enhancement and investment in our public health response system to ensure sustainable capacity to quickly identify, respond to and manage cases and outbreaks when restrictions are lifted.

- consideration of the future response strategy for the period following this wave of infection, including measures, guidance and supports required to mitigate the risks of a rebound in transmission levels.
- renewed consideration of the area of international travel, which will represent a prominent area of risk as the disease comes under control nationally and we subsequently aim to maintain suppressed disease activity and low incidence rates.

The NPHE of course remains available to provide any further advice and recommendations that may be of assistance to you and Government in relation to ongoing decision-making processes in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tony Holohan', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Tony Holohan  
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